

Folly Farm

by the same author



THE RECOVERY OF BELIEF
DECADENCE
ABOUT EDUCATION
GOD AND EVIL
GUIDE TO MODERN THOUGHT
RETURN TO PHILOSOPHY
THE TESTAMENT OF JOAD

Folly Farm

by

C. E. M. JOAD



with a preword by

John Betjeman

and

The Rev. Canon Frederic Hood

FABER AND FABER

24 Russell Square

London

*First published in mcmliv
by Faber and Faber Limited
24 Russell Square London W.C.1
Printed in Great Britain by
Purnell and Sons Limited
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Foreword

his book was written during the final stages of Cyril Joad's painful illness. He planned it after he knew that he had only a few months to live and that the increasing pain from which he was suffering could not be alleviated. He wrote it to keep his mind active and to drive off self-pity—the second a needless precaution, for he was never prone to it. It concerns things about which he felt very strongly—the preservation of the country, the depredation of it by service departments, his own farming in Sussex, good cooking and good wine, as well as many other general topics which he liked to discuss. But the book does not show, and was not intended to show, what happened in his private life after the publication of *The Recovery of Faith* and during his last months on earth. It has sometimes been stated that he took up Christianity as a result of the public humiliation he endured over his arguments by the Railway Executive for travelling without a ticket. This is not true. Many years before that incident he had been searching for faith and had made visits to the Mirfield Fathers in Yorkshire and argued with them. All his many friends, Christian and otherwise, will know how Cyril was incapable of

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hypocrisy and how his public life still left him among his friends the gentle, kind and essentially humble person he was.

When he finally learned that his disease was incurable he asked me whether I knew a clergyman to whom he could speak frankly, who would not be shocked and he said, "And I hope you won't think I am arrogant in saying this, but I want someone with whom I will not have to pull my punches, which I feel I have to do with so many of these good men." He found this person in Canon Frederic Hood, late principal of Pusey House Oxford, who writes as follows:

"I was up at Oxford at the same time as Cyril Joaze who was a prominent and provocative figure at the Union. But he and I only became friends during his last illness, which was a long one. John Betjeman told me that he badly wanted to see a priest, and for some months I saw a good deal of him. We talked the same language and thought in similar categories, and thus quickly developed a strong *rapprochement*. For several years he had been a communicant Anglican, with a great love for the simple worship in country churches. Lately he had written his *apologia*: *The Recovery of Belief*. It was, however, a tragedy that he died without publishing a sequel, for the book was very much an interim apologetic. He moved much further in his last months both in his apprehension of the Catholic religion as taught by the Church of England and in his practice of it, humbly making use of sacramental Confession and Absolution and deeply valuing his frequent Communion. The latter were taken to him by the R

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Erard Irvine, who was often driven to Joad's Hampstead home by Miss Rose Macaulay. Joad had urageous will power. Each week he conducted a minar in his bedroom. By wearing an iron jacket he ould occasionally go out in a car, and even visited the ema. To the last he had a mind like a rapier. His idency was to take things very literally and to alyse promptly whatever one said. I was often minded of the cartoon in *Punch*, which depicted him ying to a waiter, 'It depends what you mean by (a) ck and (b) clear.' Not unnaturally his thoughts often to the after life. He was realist enough to know that must not expect to go 'straight to heaven' when he d; and we often discussed whether the costly purification which lay ahead was to be thought of in terms time or of intensity. As we talked of the Gospels, he ed to see inside the mind of our Lord. Certain stories d sayings puzzled him; and he was inclined to expect t clergymen would have a tidy answer, learned at a eological college. Of the incident of the Gadarene ne he remarked, 'I'm a farmer myself, and I know t it was a serious loss.' He was perplexed by the r passages from which it might appear that Jesus icipated the final cataclysm within the lifetime of hearers. The lack of secular evidence for the veil of e Temple being rent in twain also troubled him. This ough was suggested to him by Gibbon's *Decline and U*, which was being read aloud to him, as he had never aself finished its many volumes. When he had not de his own' some part of the Church's teaching and ried to explain its content and relevance, I would

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sometimes say, 'You *want* to believe, don't you?' and he would reply, 'Passionately.' Knowing that he had only a short time to live, he was in a hurry to delve more deeply into those depths where he now knew vital truth was to be found. At the age of sixty a brilliant mind had discovered something which transformed his whole outlook on life and attitude towards his fellow men. Arrogance and hypercritical self-confidence gave place to humility and eagerness to learn: but difficulties must never be glossed over or short cuts taken. 'I never said a prayer for fifty years,' he told me. Now he knew that prayer is a science and that he was a beginner. With child-like simplicity he became a keen and willing learner. A month before he died I was obliged to leave for a preaching tour in the United States. We knew that we should not meet again in this world. My parting words were to say the Collect for the 6th Sunday after Trinity—'O God, who has prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding. . . and to give him the Blessing. He spoke that day of his loneliness as a Christian, being unable to go to Church and having so few like-minded friends. John Betjeman will relate what was done to relieve this loneliness.'

In his last few weeks Cyril suggested to me that he would very much like fellow Christians to come and make their Communion with him at his bedside in the early morning. This some of us managed to do on several occasions, and all was prepared for us through the attention of Miss Maude Matthews, who looked after Cyril devotedly until the end, giving up her work as a school-teacher to do so. Miss Rose Macaulay would

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bring up Father Whiteman of the Grosvenor Chapel in her motor car to Cyril's house on the edge of Hampstead Heath, and he brought the Blessed Sacrament with him. The rest of us came from near and far—Mervyn Horder, Hock Murray, E. W. F. Tomlin, Alan Pryce Jones. He always thanked us afterwards for being there and, if he was feeling strong enough, very much liked to talk. He remarked to me that he felt the strengthening power of the Sacrament was ten times as great when we were all there as when he received it alone.

I cannot conclude without a reference to the dignity of Cyril's last weeks alive. To see him then was an encouragement and inspiration instead of an ordeal to the many friends who came to visit him. He spoke with all his old humour, but with a calmness and wisdom which made visiting him a privilege instead of an ordeal. One could say anything to him. It puzzled him that intelligent people could have no faith. He remarked how one old and kind friend, a free-thinker, came to see him, and Cyril said to him, "Now what would you do if you knew you only had a few more weeks to live and still had your mental faculties unimpaired except for moments of pain?" The friend said to him, "Well, I would get all the books I had wanted to read and hadn't had time to read, and get through as many of them as possible." Cyril's comment to me was, "Can you imagine anything more barren?" I remember asking him questions which bothered me and which may bother other people. I said to him, "Do you really think there is such a thing as personal survival?" He said, "I am quite convinced of it." Another time I said, "Do you find questions like

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the claims of the Church of Rome important now? and "What do you feel about sexual incidents in your past?" He replied, "All those seem trivial. What really bothers me are the times when I have been unkind, and those I greatly regret." Cyril was one of the kindest of men, but his answers to my questions may be as helpful to those who read this as they were to him. It is for that reason that I put in anything so intimate.

Mervyn Horder and I went to see him on his last night alive, and we were taken in the car of a lady whom Cyril had not met. Although he was very weak, he asked that she should be brought in to sit with us, and he greeted her and said goodbye to her with the greatest courtesy. He asked Mervyn Horder to play to him on the piano, which stood at the bottom of his bed. Mervyn played a Gavotte by Handel, and Cyril remarked at the conclusion how inevitably the music concluded, just as though it were sailing into port. A few hours later he died.

JOHN BETJEMAN

FREDERIC HOOD

Introduction

would be idle to pretend that this book is a novel to claim that it ever rises above the status of a dialogue—not that there is any harm in dialogues, but they are, I am told, not well thought of by publishers and the public. My characters talk interminably because I haven't the fertility of invention to make them do anything else, and they all talk more or less like the author I am, because, having little sense of character, I don't know how to make them talk like themselves.

And if I do not know how to make them talk like themselves, still less do I know how to make them act like themselves. I did, I am not ashamed to admit, attempt a novel chapter, a chapter aglow with action, a chapter in which two apparently rational and intelligent characters (up to this point had they not been two mere projections of the author?) are so blinded by jealous passion and thwarted lust that they come near to drowning each other in Mr. Longpast's river and impaling each other on his elevator. I attempted the chapter and I finished it. Hamlet played the comedian, but I decided, on the night.

It will not escape the notice of the more literate readers that the novels or dialogues of Thomas Love Peacock have been my model, but it was only when I

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actually essayed the task of emulating them that discovered how artful was their composition; artful moreover, with an artistry which he possessed and alas, do not.

For one thing, Peacock's writings are pervaded by gaiety of continuous light-heartedness. Now light-heartedness, which is a prerogative in youth, is an achievement in age, an achievement which I fear many all too often have escaped me. For another, many of Peacock's characters live with a life of their own, and are far from being merely recognisable projections of their author; but mine, when they are not more or less recognisably me, can scarcely be said to exist at all. Indeed—I had better make a clean breast of it—I can't find much to say in favour of these characters. Mr. Crossmons and Mr. Whiteman, for example, are insipid with veracity. The answers of Miss Flightly and Mr. Highbrow can be predicted with the infallibility of a known gramophone record. Nellie Smart, for all her show of daring, is, it is obvious, the kind of girl who whispers sweet "nothing-doings" in your ear. Only Messrs. Longpast and Deepfeed do I hold a brief. At first sight, indeed, they may appear no more than a pair of cross-grained, greedy old men, but if they were sympathetically studied it will be found that in spite of their interminable dialogue on English cooking. Chapter IV they are not just drains through which good food flows to dung. For one thing, they have a flash of vitality; Mr. Longpast is, of course, an old man, an old man, moreover, who obviously hates his life. But, as he himself would say, growing old, much as

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likes it, is the only way he has yet discovered of
ing a tolerably long life, and, reading him after I
l finished with him, I was almost persuaded that he
l the gift of perpetual middle age.

again, I would claim that both Messrs. Longpast and
epfeed are civilised in the sense of the word in which
vilised man gets more out of life than an uncivilised
n achievement for which those among my readers
o are uncivilised will never forgive them.

Peacock, finally, is a master of animated narrative—
ness, for example, the Welsh mountain scenes in
tchet Castle—so that you are made to read on by
r desire to know what is going to happen. But I
it hard to believe that anybody will be sufficiently
rested in Arthur Logan and Capt. Poynter to care
y much what was the issue of the great feud which
e so near to being the subject of the last chapter of
book. If any there are, they will find the bare facts
orded in the shortest of postscripts.

ut when all is said that can be said for action and
acters, the staple of this book, such as it is, con-
in dialogue; and since this is for the most part a
ussion of ideas, I cannot hope that in England,
re, though you may with difficulty bring a reader
gging to the brink of the dark river of thought, it
matter of almost superhuman strength and strategy
ake him take the plunge, it will be favourably
ived.

C. E. M. JOAD

upstead, December 1952.

A Walk on the Downs

Through Mr. Longpast's farm there ran a river; in fact, it embraced the farm, folding itself round it in dizzy loops and presenting Mr. Longpast with long stretches of rich grazing land, partially flooded in winter, on both banks. In two places the river ran between steep slopes, called locally "hangers", whose slopes were covered with trees and bushes, and carpeted with an immense profusion of wild flowers. The main farm land was set on a southward-looking slope rising to its northern extremity to a ridge, whence was a superb view of the South Downs. In the foreground were the farm buildings, mellowed with age, the lichened moss with which the centuries had covered their roofs glowing yellow in the sunlight. Beyond stretched the meadows in which the cattle grazed, dual-purpose cattle, so that Mr. Longpast could congratulate himself on the knowledge that, whether milk or beef were being favoured by the Government policy of the moment, he would receive his full share of the encouragement afforded by the largesse of official subsidy. In matters of business Mr. Longpast, though his career had been academic, was no fool. He had probably

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made as much as any of his contemporaries and more than most by writing popular books on a subject which happened to be philosophy, and though this did him but poor service with his colleagues who were apt to dismiss as a professional black anybody who made clear and easy what they were paid to keep dark and difficult, it enabled him to reach a position of considerable financial solidity at an age when they were still lecturing for fifteen hundred pounds a year to a dozen or so students or taking several years to write for a royalty of a hundred and fifty or at most a couple of hundred pounds a book which sold a bare thousand copies. Mr. Longpast had been a good teacher in his time and his university lectures were always well attended.

Mr. Longpast supplemented his academic and literary earnings by journalism and the B.B.C. He was a fluent talker and a natural writer who could discourse with ease and address on almost any subject which editors suggested, and though he was a little too apt to rely on his imagination for his facts and his memory for his jokes, these small failings did him little disservice with a public which lacked the knowledge to check the former and the interest to recall the latter. As a broadcaster, Mr. Longpast had enjoyed great popularity until the B.B.C., for whom nothing fails like success, hustled him incontinently away from the microphone after which he was never heard again. This was done in the interests of justice, since, in the B.B.C.'s view, it was unfair that a trick of using the microphone with ease and opportunity should be allowed to raise a man

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an eminence of celebrity so vastly overtopping that his fellows. So, at least, they said. . . .

The rewards which his skill in these various departments of intellectual activity had won for him Mr. Longpast devoted to purchasing a farm, hoping by this means to enjoy the amenities of a country life at small cost to himself, since the incomings from the farm would, he was led to believe, more than pay for the upkeep of his house and garden and for the services of the boy who looked after the horse, upon which, through ageing and fattening, Mr. Longpast still liked to occasion to ride to hounds. There were also certain matters of income-tax adjustment which made it more profitable—or, shall we say, less unprofitable—for those whose incomes were mainly derived from other activities than farms than it had been in the past.

Mr. Longpast's parents on both sides had for generations been farmers—he himself, as he liked to put it, had been an intellectual “throw-out”; and in pursuing a never-increasing absorption the most varied of all interests, he had only returned late in life to the avocations of his fathers.

As he had grown older and richer, Mr. Longpast had permitted himself the growth and indulgence of prejudices to such an extent that, having spent most of his life as an orthodox left-wing Socialist, he was now finding fair to qualify for the traditional rôle of the typical British eccentric. Among his prejudices was a dread of machines of all sorts, especially cars and aeroplanes, a fear of America and all things American, a dislike of women—he was too old, he said, to need

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these for functional purposes and he failed to see what other ground a reasonable man could wish cultivate their company—an abounding contempt British food and those who provided it, a total incomprehension of contemporary music and art, and a general dislike of any development in the sphere of political literature or the British way of life that had occurred since the early 'twenties. Though, thanks to his early Socialist training, he had the grace not to say that the world was going to the dogs, that indubitably was his opinion.

Though now retired from university teaching, Mr. Longpast utilised his academic connections to recruit university students to work on his farm during the Long Vacation. They received no wage, but worked for their keep. This arrangement was to everyone's advantage. It provided the students with a change of work in beautiful and healthy surroundings, emancipated them from the burdensome need to amuse themselves for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four, and introduced them to better food than they had known before or were likely to know again, while providing Mr. Longpast with cheap, unskilled labour at the period of greatest pressure during the farm year.

One or two of Mr. Longpast's contemporaries had made a habit of staying at Folly Farm in the summer so that from June to the middle of September the house was apt to contain a fairly large party. At the present time there were staying in the house Mr. Highbrow, an old friend who had graduated from hard-shell rationalism via the Roman Catholic Church into mysticism

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Mr. Crossmons, the economist, who was making his mark as a rising Labour M.P., and Ali, a student from Pakistan. The party was completed by Nellie Smart, Mr. Longpast's much-married niece, and Miss Flightly, the housekeeper, who was not only young for her age and post but had an eye for the young of the opposite sex.

It was Mr. Longpast's habit on Sundays, when work on the farm, save for the feeding and milking of the stock, was suspended, to take the party for a long walk on the Downs.

As they sat down to breakfast on a fine Sunday morning in the middle of July, he asked whether this would be agreeable to the company. He promised them views over Chichester Harbour to the south and the Weald to the north, remarking at the same time that it was good for everybody to get away from the farm. Breakfast was being administered by Miss Flightly.

MISS FLIGHTLY: Porridge, Ali?

ALI: No, thank you.

MISS FLIGHTLY: What will you have, then? There is no catering for you vegetarians. Not only won't you eat meat, you won't eat most of the other things that ordinary people eat.

MR. LONGPAST: That's a thing I never could understand about vegetarians. Why not ordinary "marge" even ordinary butter? Why must it be nut butter? Why not ordinary cake with currants or seeds? Why must it be a special brand of fruitarian cake, and why no nuts, and again nuts?

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ALI: Nuts are very sustaining, sir.

MR. LONGPAST: No doubt, but a man doesn't want to be sustained, he wants to be pleased. How, I should like to know, do you show your superiority to the animals, if you only eat to sustain yourself? Like them you pop solid and liquid substances through a silly little hole—forgive me, Ali, yours is no sillier than that of the rest of us, including that of Miss Flightly herself—that opens at the bottom of your face. What could be more bestial? What more absurd? It is at once a man's peculiarity and his privilege to have transformed the satisfaction of this need derived from his bestial origin into the cultivation of an art, and by cunningly combining substances and blending flavours to raise from the dunghill of his appetites the fruits of gastronomy.

MISS FLIGHTLY: Well, after all that, what *will* you have, Ali, if you won't have porridge?

ALI: I will have cereal.

MR. LONGPAST: Now that's one of the things you can't have in this house.

MR. CROSSMONS: Why not?

MR. LONGPAST: *In primis* because cereals are merely a dodge to save lazy women the trouble of preparing food, and, secondly, because they chiefly come from America, or did, and cost dollars; anyway, Americans invented them and that ought to be enough. They are inedible by any civilised creature except cattle.

MR. CROSSMONS: The advantages of cereals for breakfast are that they require no preparation, that they don't go bad, that they are easily portable and

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torable, and can be made ready at a moment's notice. Thus their use sets the overburdened housewife free from unnecessary labour in the kitchen.

MR. LONGPAST: Sets her free for what? The cinema, the office, or the factory? Whichever it is, she would be better off minding her kitchen. But what, as a matter of interest, *does* Ali usually eat in the mornings?

ALI: Grapefruit, sir, if you have it, but, if not, any kind of fruit and plenty of milk—I don't take tea—and Ryvita bread.

MR. LONGPAST: I put it to you as a Christian, Ali, that this is very bad theology on your part. Does not the Bible tell you that "all flesh is as grass"? This being so, there can be great harm in a vegetarian consuming

You should read your Bible. There is also philosophy which tells us to take what little pleasure we can here below, to enjoy ourselves while we may, to "catch a fly as it flies", to *carpere diem*, and I don't know what else—all of which, being applied, means that we should make the most of the passing egg and, I wish I could add, the passing bacon—but, alas, it doesn't pass. There are also the dictates of economics, since the grapefruit (certainly) and the cereal (probably) have to be imported from hard-currency countries. I wish I could say that you showed any ill effects from your exclusive diet, but fairness compels me to add that there isn't a more tireless worker or a stronger arm in the place. You will come for a walk with us to-day, will you?

ALI: Yes, sir, I shall be pleased to come with you.

MR. LONGPAST: Who else will come?

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MR. HIGHBROW: I, for one, if you will go on the Downs. The elevation of the Downs never fails to engender a corresponding elevation of the spirit.

MR. CROSSMONS: I believe the Downs are very fine in these parts, more wild, I am told, than in the east and not so frequented.

MR. LONGPAST: In other words, further removed from the march of progress and less chastened by impact. For all that, you will be comforted by the sight of many testimonies to the advancement of our time so you will do well to come.

They set off about eleven o'clock, taking with them a lunch prepared by Miss Flightly. After some years of instruction by Mr. Longpast, who saw no reason why meals taken out of doors should not receive as much care and attention as meals taken indoors, an outdoor lunch under her management had developed far beyond its primitive origins in the native sandwich—that whitened sepulchre, as Mr. Longpast called it, hiding between its concealing walls God alone knew what horrors of inedible gristle and fish-paste smeared. It was, he averred, from the first a misconceived and misbegotten comestible, whose primary concept was tailed in relation to the quantity of contained meat at least twice the proper quantity of containing bread that any civilised eater could wish to consume. The sandwich should, he inferred, have had one bread roll only. But under stress of war and rationing, the temptation that it offered to parsimony and laziness had proved irresistible, until it had become little more than a concealment for smears of paste and scrapings of syntagma.

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am. Yet the sandwich had become universal and for the Britisher's outdoor eating was without rival or competitor. "Going out for the day, are you?" says the farm housewife or the guest-house manager, with a benevolent smile on her false, pasty face. "Right. I will go and cut some sandwiches ready for you." Whereupon everybody smiles back and thanks her, as if she were performing a special benefaction on their behalf, which is, indeed, precisely what she believes herself to be doing, instead of fobbing them off at the cost of three or four pence with a lunch which, if eaten indoors, would tax even *her* stingy providings to the extent of the best part of one and sixpence—at least they all smile and thank until they open the sandwiches and tackle the Marmite or the fish-paste, when even the worm-like stomachs of the British youth of the fifties have been known to turn.

Thus Mr. Longpast denounced the sandwich and chewed it. Instead there were two long French loaves allowed out, with omelettes (*fines herbes*) strung down their middles, some hard-boiled eggs, some slices of ham from a recently killed pig, figs from the fig tree growing against the southward-looking wall in the kitchen garden, a small basket of fresh raspberries, and a covered jar of cream; there was a flask of cider and a couple of bottles of wine. The spectacle of these nestibles subsequently spread on a tablecloth of downland turf induced Ali to confess that it almost persuaded him out of his vegetarianism, Mr. Highbrow, but it nearly caused him to renounce his practice of asceticism designed to sharpen the eye of the spirit

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—"nearly" turned out to be "quite" on this occasion—and Mr. Crossmons, that it almost reconciled him to the suggestion that there might be something to be said for the past when, Mr. Longpast assured him, people fed regularly like this when they didn't feed a good deal better.

MR. CROSSMONS: Nevertheless, as a believer in social justice, I can't refrain from remarking that a spread like this only makes the past worse. That my belly should fare ill—there is at least a rough sort of justice in that, if nobody's fares any better. But that I should batten on the fat of the land while the many are half-starving, and that the luxury of the former—I must ask you to overlook this mixture of metaphor by the "former" I mean not the belly but its owner—my putative self—should flaunt itself to outrage the misery of the latter—*that* is intolerable.

MR. LONGPAST: And I think it is better that some should eat like civilised beings, eat, that is to say, to enjoy themselves, than that all should eat like animals to maintain themselves.

MR. Highbrow: And I think that what you show and how much of it, through—how did you so elegantly put it at breakfast?

MR. LONGPAST: A silly little hole that opens the bottom of your face.

MR. Highbrow:—matters precious little one way or the other. Life, I am told, may be maintained on a handful of rice or a rusk and glass of milk a day. What is possible is surely also desirable. The less you gratify the appetites of the flesh, the brighter will shine the eye of the spirit.

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ALI: That is right, sir. That is what they say in my country where the holy men eat very little.

MR. LONGPAST: If they say so in your country, it must be right.

The Downs that run from West Sussex into East Hampshire are well wooded and though every now and then a bare hilltop rises above the trees, the general effect is very different from the appearance of the Western Downs, with their succession of bare, grassy ridges. But there is nobody about, and the inn where

Longpast stopped for a glass of beer is several miles from any inhabited place. How it maintains itself in an economic proposition is a mystery, but at the inn there is a clearing in the wood where Tappit, the sheep-keeper, grows some straggly crops and keeps a few sheep. His wife, who is nearly deaf, is distinguished by a enormous goitre and the husband, having shouted at her for more years than he can remember and hearing nobody else to talk to, has forgotten how to talk without shouting, and speaks in a deafening roar. Near the immediate environs of the inn there play children—small children, apparently ownerless children—very dirty children, but today being a Sunday, each one has washed their faces or, rather, has washed away the patches in the middle of their faces, leaving a gleam of glory of dirt all round. It reminded him, Mr. High-remarked, of the condition of human illumination. And, he said, of our knowledge, the area of the known, as a little lighted patch set in the midst of a sea of environing darkness, the unknown. Then the more you enlarge the area of the patch, the known,

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the more also you enlarge its area of contact with the surrounding environment, the unknown. In other words, the more you know, the more convinced you become of the extent of your ignorance.

MR. LONGPAST: I don't see the analogy. Are you suggesting that if you were to wash the whole of the child you would only become more conscious of its dirt?

MR. Highbrow: No, because the surface of the child is finite and you would come to the end of it, but the universe is infinite and you wouldn't come to the end of *that*.

MR. LONGPAST: Then the analogy doesn't hold, which is just what I said.

They took lunch on the top of Beacon Hill, where there were great views to the north and the south. Mr. Longpast did the guide-book honours. To the north, he explained, you looked away over the Weald, past Blackdown and Hascombe hills whence Cobbett rose to the hills of Leith, Holmbury and Pitch, great snows of sand sticking out into the Weald, haunts of the London week-end walker. To the south you looked away over southward-stretching spurs of the Downs, Bow Hill and Halnaker to Chichester, St. Catherine and Butser towards Portsmouth. The spire of Chichester Cathedral could just be seen pricking up to heaven and the waters of the harbour glittered silver in the sunlight.

MR. Highbrow: What a wide prospect. How it lifts the soul and makes you think of the infinite majesty of God who made it. It is in such prospects that the divine reveals its nature to man.

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MR. LONGPAST: It doesn't uplift me and it doesn't make me think of God.

ALI: What does it make you think of, sir?

MR. LONGPAST: Sheep, ragwort, the plough, the various Departments and the march of progress generally.

MR. CROSSMONS: Are you proposing to mount your bicycle?

MR. LONGPAST: I am proposing, with your permission, to tell you what has happened to the Downs. Twenty years ago—no, less, twenty-five years ago—the Downs supported flocks of sheep. These kept the grass short and no weed could escape those close-nibbling animals. Sheep, you know, are the closest grazers of all animals. Hence the lovely smooth carpet of the Downs; hence the springiness of the turf which made it a joy to walk on. They were for the most part enclosed, and you could walk mile after mile in any direction without coming to the end of the carpet.

MR. CROSSMONS: Can't you now?

MR. LONGPAST: Not for long. For reasons best known to yourself in your capacity as legislator and economist, the sheep are gone. The only sheep left in existence to-day are those folded in fields and living on the Downs, apart from a few flocks on Romney Marsh. Even if we wanted to bring them back to the Downs, we can't, because there are no shepherds. The sheep is to all intents and purposes an extinct species. What do you suppose has taken the place of the sheep?

MR. CROSSMONS: Nothing, as far as I can see.

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MR. LONGPAST: You are wrong. First of all, weeds have taken their place. Large areas of the Downs were ploughed up during the war. Much of the ploughland has been left derelict and is now covered with weed and coarse grass. Ragwort in particular is increasing at an unprecedented rate. Do you see that slope over there? [Mr. Longpast pointed to a slope that glowed yellow in the sunshine.] Do you know why it is yellow instead of green? Because of ragwort. Now the seed of the ragwort blows over the Downs and settles on the fields in the valleys, with the result that there has never been so much weeding to do on Sussex and Hampshire farms as there is to-day. The trouble is that people have discovered that if you plough up the Downs you can grow very good crops. Of course, you have to clear them first, but modern machinery, bulldozers and diggers and gyro-tillers and the Lord knows what, makes the clearing comparatively easy, so the trees are cut down, the bushes uprooted and the soil gashed and crushed until the place looks like a vast mud heap. Everywhere you see the tracks of these monsters running across fields and through copses, making deep rents in the turf, committing irreparable devastation. The Downs I am afraid, will never recover in our lifetime.

MR. CROSSMONS: But, as you say, you get the crop and good ones too. When we have to grow every ounce of food we can at home, we can't afford to leave any land uncultivated.

MR. LONGPAST: But what a short-sighted policy! this Downland topsoil is not more than an inch, at most, two inches thick. That is to say, the stored

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tility resulting from centuries of sheep farming only as down a very short way. Consequently, when they

ploughed, the Downs will grow one good crop, possibly two, even on occasion three, but no more. a couple of years' time that field of corn you are looking at now will be a derelict waste covered with weeds. Now if we kept the Downs as grass and kept sheep to graze them, these thousands of acres would continue to play their unique and natural part, as they have done for hundreds of years, in our national economy, producing the kind of food that they are capable of producing year in and year out, without any loss of fertility. Also [Mr. Longpast added wistfully] the nation would once again have a saddle.

R. HIGHBROW: All this comes of trying to interfere with the natural rhythm of things. The universe has a pulse which beats on its own, producing things according to their place and season. Try to have them out of season, strawberries, frozen, in December or, worse, in April instead of in June, or peas and mushrooms all the year round, and they will lose their character. It is like pulling apart the petals of a flower before it is ready to open of its own accord. So if you interfere with things out of their appointed time and place, for example, crops from the Downs instead of from the north, nature will punish you by bequeathing you a wilderness of weeds. That is the Nemesis which the farmers have provoked by their hurry and greed. When they have cut down the trees, they have taken crops from the land and put nothing back into it, and have turned great areas of the Middle West into barren

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desert where nothing will grow because all the fertile topsoil has blown away. I had thought that we knew better than that here in England.

MR. LONGPAST: We did once, but the march progress, that is to say the application of factory methods to the cultivation of the land, has been too much for our traditional wisdom. Just look at this now. [He pointed to a large field on the opposite slope which appeared to consist of a surface of flints, through which thistle, dock and ragwort thrust their ugly heads.] Can you imagine what happened there?

MR. CROSSMONS: No, but do you tell us. The Labour Party is always glad of information which will assist it in the framing of its agricultural policy.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, a new owner recently bought this stretch of the Downs. He was a gentleman from London, farming at a loss in order to reduce the amount of income on which he had to pay tax. Well, he ploughed up the bit you see in front of you and planted linseed, and a first-rate crop he got; for three months the whole slope was blue. The next year he planted barley; but the topsoil turned out to be too thin to bear a second crop. Now, in the fourth year it is—what you see. What you see can never be brought back into farming use, that is, use for pasture which is its right use, until it has been cleared and cleaned, reploughed and seeded down to a new grass ley, and at a pretty penny that is going to cost.

ALI: What has been happening there, sir?

He pointed to a deep hollow running into the Downs forming a cup or coomb which, from top to bottom

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distance of from five to six hundred feet, was covered with trees. At least, it had been covered with trees, but most of them had recently been cut down and were now lying higgledy-piggledy all over the sides of the bomb, their jagged stumps and truncated limbs jutting out to heaven. To and fro across the sides of the bomb ran a number of muddy tracks, in one of which a tractor was standing, having sunk up to its axles in the mud of a July thunderstorm.

MR. LONGPAST: More evidence of progress. That bomb is one of many which run into the Downs in these parts—hangers, we call them—and was once covered with beeches. They were a noble sight, their trunks rising straight like pillars, their tops a tracery of varied shades of green. To walk among them was like being in a cathedral lit by a dim green light. Well, the business syndicate sent down their agent, Mr. Mainchance, who bought them for a song, and then cut them down. Cutting them down was easy enough, but getting them away, when they had been cut down, proved out to be very much more difficult owing to the steepness of the slope. Lorries couldn't get up the slope, tractors stuck in the mud. So there the trunks are and are likely to remain, while the hanger will be given over to scrub and weeds—another monument to the march of urban progress in the country.

MR. CROSSMONS: You needn't be so hard on us. Our economic situation is pretty desperate and we have to make what we can out of our national assets. Some of the uses to which we are compelled to put them are new and we are bound to make mistakes, but

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by and large you wouldn't object to our cutting down valuable timber, would you?

MR. Highbrow: Great trees elevate the soul and turn the mind to God. When they are placed in situations of commanding eminence, which those who planted them in the eighteenth century invariably chose, they should be left to stand, whatever the plight of the country. Man, after all, is not just belly to be filled; he has a spirit which requires the sustenance of beauty.

MR. Longpast: And so they will be left to stand in the places which everybody knows, that is to say in those places which have come to be regarded as beauty spots—for example, Chanctonbury Ring. Chanctonbury Ring will stand, but the Bishop's Ring above Dunston, which townspeople don't know, is already threatened; and the beech clump on the hill behind Fernhurst, which the Saxons are said to have used as a temple, has already gone. That sort of thing is happening all over the country which, at the present rate of progress, will end as a wasteland stretching from London to the coast, studded with a few mutilated beauty spots, complete with picture postcard mineral waters, "cuppas" and ice-cream sold by unserved rustics in smocks.

As they continued their walk the woods parted and reveal a great prospect northward over the Weald. Fields, copses threaded by little streams, old farmhouses whose roofs were covered with lichen, and great trees standing solidly in their fields, with every now and then a Lombardy poplar like an exclamation mark.

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point the beauty of the scene, constituted a prospect near perfection as the heart could wish. Certainly seemed so to Mr. Highbrow, who pronounced it one of the most perfect prospects in the south of England.

"It was certainly, but isn't," said Mr. Longpast. "Pray suspend your verdict till we get through this wood in front of us." They plunged into a beech wood, treaded their way through and emerged on the far side to another view of the same wide prospect. "Now look, first, this way," said Mr. Longpast. "This way" as towards a rounded summit lying immediately to the south. "What, pray, do you see? Dew ponds, green turf, lambs feeding on it, larks rising from it, in fact the traditional Downland sights? Of course you don't." What they in fact saw was the *débris* of a camp, half-smantled buildings, trailing strands of barbed wire, lengths of rusting railway track, great lumps of crumbling concrete, the remains of occupation by the Service apartments who, as Mr. Longpast was careful to explain, are the greatest destroyers yet to appear in the countryside. Soldiers, he said, create more devastation, create it more quickly and over a larger area than any other living organisation with the exception of vultry.

MR. HIGHBROW: Has there, then, been no attempt to clear the mess up?

MR. LONGPAST: None, as far as I know. It has been so ever since the war and that is six years ago. Now look over there. [He pointed to the Weald below.] On this side they saw rows of new houses with staring pink-tiled roofs breaking out on the surface of the green,

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for all the world as if the earth had caught eczema and was coming out in a rash.

MR. CROSSMONS: Council houses, I suppose.

MR. LONGPAST: Council houses indeed, replete, have no doubt, with every convenience in the way of modern plumbing, built-in cupboards, plate racks, draining boards, washing-up machines, airing cupboards and, for all I know, even refrigerators, that the wits of Americans have been able to devise, but, nevertheless, shattering the beauty of the countryside beyond repair.

MR. HIGHBROW: That, surely, is an exaggeration. I hadn't even noticed them.

MR. LONGPAST: You wouldn't. Your head was in the air, your thoughts dwelt upon reality.

MR. CROSSMONS: But how, pray, do you propose to house the rural population if not in trim little houses such as these? We all know how utterly uncomfortable, unhealthy and insanitary were the picturesque cottages of the past which those who don't have to live in them so much admire. You aren't going to tell me that you want people to be crippled by rheumatism and arthritis before their time, as are most of the dwellers in the traditional thatched cottage. If you don't, how, I repeat, do you propose to re-house the rural population?

MR. LONGPAST: I don't propose anything.

MR. CROSSMONS: Then what are you going to do with them?

MR. LONGPAST: Do with them? Why, sir, nothing. Am I my brother's keeper? I don't think they ought to be.

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MR. CROSSMONS: What do you mean by "ought not to be"? There they are; they can't help themselves.

MR. LONGPAST: Yes they can, or rather, their parents, who should have used birth-control, could. But since they didn't and children were born to them, they ought to have been got out of the way with all possible despatch.

MR. CROSSMONS: What on earth do you mean, sir?

MR. LONGPAST: Why, sent abroad, of course. It's as plain as the nose on your face that there are far too many people in this country. Consider the figures. During most of our history we have been—I am speaking of England and Wales—about six million persons. In 1800 we were between eight and nine. In 1900, as the result of a hundred years of industrial revolution, we were between thirty-two and thirty-three. To-day we are forty-three. If we go on increasing at the present rate, by the end of the century we shall be over fifty millions, packed together in this relatively small island without the slightest prospect of being able to feed ourselves. Now what on earth is the point of being so many?

ALI: Perhaps, sir, it is because you want to be strong so that you can fight your enemies in war.

MR. LONGPAST: But, my dear Ali, you must know that numbers without space are now a handicap in war. The next war will be fought by radar-directed projectiles and atom bombs. Close-packed populations are the best possible target for both. Hence the more clutterland you have to disperse in the better. Well, how much room is there for dispersal in England?

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MR. CROSSMONS: But whatever may be the military aspect of the matter, what you suggest is bad economics. Ever since we took the lead in the industrial revolution and our population grew and multiplied, we have had to export great quantities of manufactured goods in order to buy imports of food with which to feed them and of raw materials to keep our factories going. Hence, we have to have multitudes of workers for industry in order to maintain a high rate of production.

MR. LONGPAST: In other words, we have got to have a large population in order to enable us to maintain a large population. But suppose you had a small population—went back, for example, to the eight millions of the late eighteenth century—then we could feed ourselves on food produced at home and need not export manufactured goods in order to buy food abroad. Consider how much better people ate when they lived on food produced at home. Reflect, for example, upon the feeding in Parson Woodforde's Diaries, in Peacock's novels, or even in Dickens's. Compare that with our miserable diet to-day when a man will eat less meat in a week than his grandfather ate at a meal.

MR. Highbrow: Longpast, you dwell too much on food. Nevertheless I, too, think that the population could with advantage be reduced, though for other and, I submit, better reasons. When you live in a crowd, you have few opportunities for solitude and without solitude the spirit cannot expand. You must be alone to meditate. How can you listen to the music of the spheres in the rough and tumble of the London

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rush-hour? If you have been jostled and hustled on your twice-a-day journey from home to office and office to home, you never have time to recover yourself or enter into possession of yourself. When the mud is stirred, the soul can no longer reflect the stars.

MR. LONGPAST: I am surprised at you, Highbrow. You should consider, rather, how great are the conveniences with which science has invested modern transport. Because of science we can now all travel the greatest possible distances in the greatest possible discomfort, and do.

MR. CROSSMONS: Talking of diminishing—or increasing—the population, who are these two riding towards us?

ALI: Is not the gentleman Capt. Poynter?

MR. LONGPAST: Yes, Nellie and Jack. So it is. Poynter is something of a celebrity. Although he shoots hardly at all, and very badly at that, he breeds and trains gun dogs on a scale which enables him to cut quite a figure. At the moment he seems to be under the impression he is captivating my niece.

II

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Nellie Longpast, or Nellie Smart as she should strictly be called, though it was some time since she had been seen with her most-recent husband, was Mr. Longpast's niece, and as he had for many years been her guardian he now punctuated her marriages by reassuming the relationship but not the responsibility. She grew up a beauty with a trim figure, a lovely complexion and a pair of deep-blue eyes which opened wide upon you with an air of seeming innocence which nothing in either the nature or the experience of their owner could be said to justify. Mr. Longpast had brought her up on a gospel of strenuous endeavor—he wanted her to win a scholarship to Oxford and perhaps go into politics later; his secret hope was to follow vicariously in her the political career he had missed himself—with the result that comparatively early in life she had made up her mind that she would get through it with as little work as she could reasonably contrive, which meant that the only way of making a living she was prepared to tolerate was upon the earnings of some man. Provided that the earnings were high enough, she was quite prepared to marry

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m, if necessary, in order to share them. She was
etty enough at one time to have had—and taken—
r pick of a considerable number of well-to-do young
ntemporaries.

Christopher Smart, the current husband, earned
thing at all, but had inherited a large income from
; forebears who had done very well for themselves
importers, though what they imported Mr. Longpast
d never discovered, Nellie had forgotten and
ristopher had probably never known. It was
fortunate that he should not have been an equally
gible partner on other grounds, but he was lazy,
npish, apathetic and totally without conversation.
? he were a fish, Nellie," Mr. Longpast had said
en Smart was discussed as a possible husband,
he were a fish I'd put him back." Nellie had
rried him nevertheless, and had for some years
rously co-operated with him in the spending of
not inconsiderable capital, even if she had co-
rated in nothing else. When asked if marrying for
ney had made her happy—since it was, after all,
accountable to those who knew Christopher Smart
t she should have married him for any other reason—
said that even if the money didn't make her happy,
ad at least enabled her to be miserable in comfort.
Their co-operative efforts to diminish the Smart
une had been on the whole so successful that there
now very little left, and Nellie had for some time
t been allowing her fancy to stray in other directions.
aken shot, she had struck up a friendship with the
isible Poynter and how far matters had gone

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between them was arousing the usual measure of curiosity. From the point of view of physique they were admirably matched, Capt. Poynter, black-haired, bronzed, broad and burly, was handsome enough to turn any girl's head. He was popular and well respected in the district; but his interests were narrow. Outdoors dogs and shooting he had no conversation, and as long as Longpast did not fail to point out to his niece, a succession of *tête-à-têtes* with him on long winter evenings would bore her beyond endurance. Capt. Poynter might have hinted, be a past master in the art of love, but there even in the country one couldn't decently go to bed until half-past nine, and from four-thirty when it began to get dark to nine-thirty was a long stretch. "It's all very well," Mr. Longpast had said, "to meet him privily in the local pub. The circumstances are notoriously glamorous and no doubt you get a lot of excitement from the furtivity, but it won't be the same thing at all when you regularise your association. If Poynter marries you, or at any rate sets up house with you, you will have nowhere to spend your evenings."

How far these warnings had been heeded Mr. Longpast did not know, but Nellie, who had now been living for some months at Folly Farm, continued absent herself from it for long afternoons and evenings. One afternoon, shortly after her ride on the Downs, she was walking with Capt. Poynter along a footpath that ran along the banks of the river that threaded the farm. The course of this footpath was enchanting. On one side ran the slow-moving river, fringed with alders and willows, and at this time of the year gay with

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ostrife and meadowsweet. Along its quiet reaches water birds, moorhens and coots and mallards, flew and ram and splashed, while every now and then a rare flash of silver and blue proclaimed the passage of a angfisher.

On the other side a steeply-rising wooded slope, known locally as a hanger, was punctually adorned year after year with the most lavish succession of wild flowers. Snowdrops, celandines, and daffodils, followed primroses, bluebells and campions, succeeded one another in the richest profusion, the procession being headed off by a display of foxgloves so rich and lush that the whole of the side of the hanger was bathed in a translucent pink glow. The foxgloves were just coming into flower as Nellie and Capt. Poynter went along this path, talking earnestly of what they should do. Could they live together in the district and outface public opinion? Should they leave the district and live elsewhere where they were unknown? Should they continue as they were, meeting clandestinely, or should they break off their relationship altogether? There seemed to be insuperable objections to each and all of these courses. Gradually the sides of the hanger flattened out and the hanger itself was replaced by a field of sugar beet, separated from the path by a thick-set thorn hedge. Nellie and Capt. Poynter walked along this path. Between the hedge and the river, they heard voices on the other side of the hedge, voices apparently engaged in earnest argument. Bending down and peering through the lower part of the hedge, they saw two Mr. Longpast's students with hoes in their hands

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singling rows of sugar-beet. Of these Mr. Jones was a Welshman who, with all the eloquence of his countrymen, was inveighing against war and Empire. The other Michael Whiteman, was vigorously expostulating and defending the British political verities, including the Britisher's native right to rule over natives.

JONES: In this matter, reason, morality and prudence for once go hand in hand. Reason points out that, if one nation has a quarrel with another nation it is irrational to endeavour to demonstrate the superior rightness of your cause by killing off as many of the other side as you possibly can; since, if you succeed in killing off more of them than they of you, all you have in fact succeeded in demonstrating is your superior *might*, and even you, I would take it, haven't yet got to the stage of identifying right with might.

WHITEMAN: I think it is right to try to preserve yourself and your family and to defend your way of life, and I think it is right to be strong in order to do so. If that is what you mean by saying that might is right, then might *is* right, and quite rightly.

JONES: But what has superior efficiency in killing which is what being strong means, to do with right? Murder, which is the killing of our fellow men, we all know to be wrong. It doesn't suddenly become right because it is committed by order of the State upon the persons of other human beings whom you have never seen and with whom you have, therefore, no quarrel which is where morality joins hands with reason.

WHITEMAN: But suppose the other human being happen to be bandits or rebels and are threatening

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law and order by revolting against the authority of the Government.

JONES: Do you perhaps mean the subject peoples of our Empire who are trying to liberate themselves from what they conceive to be an alien rule and to become independent?

WHITEMAN: I mean offenders against law and order of all kinds—for example, the bandits in Malaya. I maintain—and everybody would agree with me—that the Government has a right to put them down in the interests of preserving peace.

JONES: But why should they be called rebels and bandits? They didn't ask us to come to their country and rule it and exploit it. We came without so much as a by your leave and took it over by force; that is, we took it over because we had superior weapons. Why, then, because they now want to run their country themselves, should we call them rebels?

WHITEMAN: Because *we* are the Government and *they* are not. And, what's more, we're jolly well going to stay the Government.

JONES: But if they succeeded in turning us out they would be the Government and a patriotic Government to the bargain.

"The rebel is the patriot who fails.

The patriot is the rebel who prevails."

Have you never heard that great political truth?

WHITEMAN: Well, all I can say is they are jolly well going to prevail. We have the guns, the tanks and planes and we can always stop that sort of nonsense.

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JONES: As we stopped it in India, as we are stopping it in Malaya, and as the French are stopping it in Indo-China—by our superior efficiency in the art of slaughter? Sorry, but I couldn't resist saying that.

What *you* seem to me to be saying, and all that *you* seem to be saying, is that we have or ought to have the power because we have the weapons, and what sort of power is that, I should like to know?

WHITEMAN: The power to govern undeveloped peoples for their own good.

JONES: In other words, the power of the bully and the blackmailer—'Do as I say; if you don't, I will blow your cities to pieces, murder your people, rape your women.' When we come down to rock bottom, the power of superior force is simply the power to make other people do your will by inflicting gross physical agony on them, if they don't. Not a very winsome attribute, nor, one would have thought, very appropriate in a Christian people, officially committed to Jesus's gospel of love for their fellow men.

WHITEMAN: Please leave religion out of it—not but what it fits in perfectly well, because, after all, we are in Malaya and other places for the people's good. *is we* who irrigate their lands, drain their swamps, cure their malaria, throw bridges over their gorges, lengthen their lives, keep their babies and their mothers alive in childbirth, preserve their cattle by destroying the tsetse fly. . . . There is no end to the benefits that our civilisation brings them.

JONES: Strange, then, that they should be so anxious to be rid of us. Do you recall, for example, the anxiety

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of the Indians, to whom, after years of irrigation and famine, you might have supposed that we would have endeared ourselves?

WHITEMAN: Ungrateful devils! Don't know what's good for them! Been quarrelling among themselves ever since our blasted Labour Government scuttled the ship and cleared out. Just what you'd expect.

JONES: What, the scuttling by the Labour Government or the quarrelling among the Indians?

WHITEMAN (with a comprehensive sweep of the land): Both.

JONES: But, seriously, do you think it is ethically admirable to hold down other people by force?

CAPT. POYNTER (from behind the hedge): My lord, just listen to him, the canting hypocrite!

WHITEMAN: I don't know anything about that. People have always done it, usually, I suppose, to further their own interests by increasing their wealth and power. *We* are showing them a superior way of life: *we* are civilising them.

JONES: Be careful or you will find yourself saying that we are "liberating" them next. But would you seriously consider this a sufficient excuse for breaking into another man's house and establishing yourself there—I mean that you were proposing to exhibit to him a superior way of life, were going, in fact, to civilise him? Suppose he didn't want to be civilised.

WHITEMAN: Well, he jolly well ought to want to, and to be made to, if he doesn't. But the analogy doesn't hold, anyway, because nobody's advocating housebreaking.

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Mr. Longpast had been taking his afternoon walk round the farm and had for the last few minutes been listening to the duologue of the putative sugar-bee-singlers who, for their part, had been much too busy with their discussion to notice him until he intervened with a challenge to Michael.

"Are you," he asked, "certain that our civilisation is so superior? What are its outstanding products? Plumbing, cars, refrigerators, radio, television, gadgets generally. Is it not possible for you to conceive of people to whom these make little or no appeal? And what is all this talk about medicine and malaria and marsh draining? Stinks and fever are not all. Though the western world is cleaner than it has ever been and more sanitary, it is also much noisier. Look at our refined women opening tins in their hygienic kitchens, where all the pans are clean and all the food is tasteless; turning up their foolish noses at the least suggestion of a smell and looking down them at the Middle Ages just because they had no drains, at the very moment when they are acquiescing without turning a hair at every conceivable assault upon the sense of hearing.

Our civilisation may not stink, but what with the radio, the gramophone, the gas engine and the eternal throb of internal combustion engines of all sorts, not to speak of the screaming, shouting and gushing of emancipated women, it was never so noisy.

WHITEMAN: I think, sir, if you will forgive me saying so, you are straying a bit from the point. We were talking about whether we ought to maintain

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sufficiently strong army, navy and air force to guarantee the protection of our Empire. I was saying that our civilisation was the highest in the world and that it was our duty to make its benefits available to less developed peoples. Surely you agree with that.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, I suppose our civilisation has been responsible for destroying more of its members, or destroying them in a shorter time, from longer distances, higher altitudes and in more ingenious and, I make no doubt, painful ways than any other. Is this the model you would hold up? Are these the benefits you would wish to spread?

WHITEMAN: War, no doubt, is the great scourge of the western world, but surely you would agree that the two wars we fought were necessary. They were fought to preserve our liberties and the British way of life whose superiority they so convincingly demonstrated.

MR. LONGPAST: Fiddlesticks! They demonstrated nothing but our superior ability in organising the mass slaughter of our fellow human beings. As to their being necessary, do you consider that there is more liberty in the world, and that the British way of life stands more unchallenged to-day than before they were fought? All wars are professedly fought for abstract ideals by means of which millions seek to rationalise and excuse their primitive ferocity.

WHITEMAN: What else should they be fought for?

MR. LONGPAST: For survival, for land and for food. Don't you know the story of the cannibal chief to whom a missionary was commending the white

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man's civilisation on precisely the grounds which you have brought forward, namely that it was superior to his own, and the chief replied that his people killed for a good reason, because they were hungry, but it appeared to him that white men killed people whom they didn't want to eat. Could a civilisation, he wanted to know, really be superior that killed other people that weren't necessary for its sustenance, just for fun as it were.

WHITEMAN: You are pleased to be facetious, sir, at our expense. But what does all this tend to? Would you give up the Empire and get out?

MR. LONGPAST: Certainly.

This was too much for Capt. Poynter who all the time had been simmering on the other side of the hedge, rumbling with indignation as if he were the national bowels. He broke through the hedge as if it had been made of paper and presented himself, bulging-necked and red-faced, before the astonished eyes of the disputants. Turning angrily on Mr. Longpast, asked him what the devil he meant by it. "Mean what?" asked that surprised gentleman.

CAPT. POYNTER: Why, by talking this testicular nonsense about the Empire! Give up the Empire, the Empire which our ancestors fought to win!

MR. LONGPAST: Facing innumerable odds, leaving their bones on stricken fields, cementing with blood and sweat the bonds of Empire, bearing the white man's burden and all that, eh?

CAPT. POYNTER: It pleases you to be facetious at the Empire's expense, but if history, the history

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in our own country and the doings of brave men mean nothing to you, haven't you ever asked yourself what would happen if we ratted and cleared out as the Labour Government has ratted and cleared out of India?

MR. LONGPAST: I have no idea, I'm sure.

CAPT. POYNTER: Why, the Russians would move, of course. But, anyway, who are you, I'd like to know, to give away the Empire? What the hell have you to do with it one way or the other? I'd thank you to keep your hands off it.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, what, if it comes to that, are you doing with my niece? Who, I would like to know, are you to go strolling about the farm, skulking behind hedges and then breaking them down? Without advising you to keep your hands off her, I've half a mind to ask you your intentions.

CAPT. POYNTER (taken aback): My intentions? What do you mean?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, do you, for example, intend to behave honourably by her, or do you intend to act like what used to be called a gentleman? After all, she has got a husband.

NELLIE: Uncle, don't be tiresome. You know I am quite well able to look after myself.

MR. LONGPAST: I know you are, my dear; besides, it would be idle for me to pretend that I would care very much, if you weren't. I have always believed in letting the young make a mess of their own lives in their own way, if they insisted on it. But really, your putting turkey-cock of a friend was taking such

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a very high moral line about the Empire that I could resist it. [Turning to Capt. Poynter.] Please overlook my ill-timed intervention on behalf of my niece. I withdraw, I apologise. I fully admit that she was worth it.

CAPT. POYNTER: Really, sir, that's quite all right. Anyway, let me assure you that I mean no harm to Mrs. Smart.

NELLIE: Nonsense, you know that you do.

CAPT. POYNTER: Really, Nellie, my dear, I shouldn't say such things.

MR. LONGPAST: This is most embarrassing. I much prefer the Empire as a subject of conversation. Since you, Captain, you are so deeply sensitive to our national interests, permit me to ask you a couple of questions. First, from what you said, I deduce that you are concerned not only for "the lesser breeds without the law" but also for the welfare of the people of these islands. Not only do you care for the English but you admire them. Not to put too fine a point on it, you think they are the cat's whiskers.

CAPT. POYNTER: I don't want to boast, but, sir, what you like, for "guts", for reliability, for honest and decent living, there is nobody to hold a candle to but an Englishman.

MR. LONGPAST: Quite so. Then you would wish to keep these men, so brave, so reliable, so decent, the best of lives that it is possible for young men to live.

WHITEMAN: Of course I would—not that under the present Government there's much chance for a young man in England to-day.

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MR. LONGPAST: Possibly, possibly not. But why, then, do you doom so many of them to lead such horrible lives?

CAPT. POYNTER: I don't know what you are setting at. I want young Englishmen to lead horrible lives! I want no such thing. Have you gone out of your senses?

MR. LONGPAST: But don't you? Consider the Empire. Much of it lies in the tropics; the climate is totally unsuited to northern Europeans; they catch malaria and dysentery, they get heat stroke, their nerves get out of order, they dry up and turn yellow. To the eye of anybody who has been brought up in England the countryside is usually appalling; most of it is either jungle or desert; there is no grass that anybody can call grass; it is horribly hot, and the air is infested by the most loathsome insects.

But it is the Empire, and the Empire, you say, must be maintained. So you take hundreds, thousands, nay hundreds of thousands of young Englishmen, you take them from their homes and their friends and their natural environment, and you put them down to work in these dreadful places where you leave them to simmer and stew. There they are, sweltering in the heat, building bridges, making roads, planting trees, clearing jungles, running plantations. Or, more precisely, they are ordering about gangs of black labourers who are building the bridges, making the roads, planting the trees, clearing the jungles, working in the plantations. When away from their kind, these young men are not naturally bored and lonely, so they go to the club

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where they drink too much gin. All too soon they begin to coarsen, they grow tough; they swop dirty stories; they talk too much; they become club bores. Over and over again I have seen nice young men, fresh and unspoiled, going out to one of these places, going, say, to West or to East Africa, or going in the old days to Burma. On each successive "leave" I have seen their deterioration. Each successive leave they are yellower and more irritable; they drink more; they boast more; they throw their weight about more. Their early innocence and charm gradually fade. At home they don't fit into the English society and they know it. If they are married, it's worse, for the climate is usually so bad that they have to send their children back to England to be educated. Either their wives go back with the children and they live lonely, deprived lives, or they don't and there are partings and heartbreak all round, with the children spending their holidays at school or with strangers. Now why, I want to know, should you condemn so many of our young people to this sort of thing?

CAPT. POYNTER: It is part of the burden of Empire that we have to bear.

MR. LONGPAST: But why have we? Have the Danes an Empire, or the Swedes? They have none. Yet as far as I know, they manage very well without one, and while the young man who is so unfortunate as to happen to be English is sent to rot abroad in order, as you say, to maintain the Empire, the young Dane or the young Swede stays at home in his own home among his own people in a climate that suits

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him, and lives with his wife and children. How much better to be a young Dane or a young Swede without an Empire. Now why, I want to know, do you deliberately choose for your countrymen, many of them at the first blossoming of their young manhood, a worse life than is lived by young Danes or young Swedes?—or, may I add, young Germans or young Italians or young Americans, none of whom have any Empire worth speaking of and can leave their youngsters in peace?

CAPT. POYNTER: You miss the obvious point, which is that greatness carries its responsibilities which we have to shoulder. To shirk them would be a sign of softness; if we did shirk them, we should be a decaying people. As it is, the Empire is a sort of training ground. It gives our young men valuable administrative experience. It teaches them the rule of other men.

MR. LONGPAST: Do you *really* mean administrative experience, which they could get just as well at home, or do you in fact mean, as your last words suggest, experience in ruling, that is in ordering other people about?

CAPT. POYNTER: Well, of course, ruling is involved. A white man ought to be able to give orders and get himself obeyed.

MR. LONGPAST: Why ought he?

CAPT. POYNTER: So that he may be fit to rule the Empire when his time comes.

MR. LONGPAST: So that's it, is it? You must first have an Empire in order to train people in ruling,

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and people must then be trained in ruling other people in order that they may be able to run the Empire. But if there is no Empire there is no need to acquire experience in ruling other people against their will. And what you haven't explained to me is what necessity there is either for Empire or for ruling. Who said that we must rule the blacks or the Egyptians or the Indians? Did they originally ask us to go to their countries and shoulder this burden? Haven't most of them, on the contrary, been only too anxious to get rid of us?

NELLIE: You know, Jack, that's quite right. I had to break things off with two of my nicest husbands because each of them had to go to some frightful place—one was to Siam and the other to the Gold Coast—to build railways or something of the kind, and of course I wouldn't go with them. They couldn't very well expect it. As uncle says, why should we send our young men into exile?

MR. LONGPAST: Then there is another thing—you will remember I had a second question to ask you. Having an Empire is now so terribly dangerous.

WHITEMAN: What do you mean, sir?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, it makes it reasonably certain that you will be involved in any war that happens to be going.

WHITEMAN: Why so?

MR. LONGPAST: Because your Empire excites the cupidity of others and you have to maintain a large number of troops, not to speak of ships and aircraft to protect it. Now, having a large army, a large navy,

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and a large air force are far and away the best recipe for being involved in a modern war.

WHITEMAN: But that, sir, if you will excuse me saying so, is nonsense. The only way to keep the peace is to be strongly prepared for war so that, if your neighbours attack you, you can defend yourself. When they know that, they won't attack you.

MR. LONGPAST: I suppose that to be really rock-bottom safe it would be an advantage to be actually stronger than any of your neighbours.

CAPT. POYNTER: Of course. To be so much stronger than anybody else that nobody dare attack you—that's the thing.

MR. LONGPAST: Is that the advice you would have given to Germany, say, in the past, or to Russia now?

CAPT. POYNTER: I'm not talking of them.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, it strikes me that if this is the right advice to give to one nation, our own for keeping us out of war, it must also be the right advice to give to all nations to keep them out of war. Or do you suppose that there is something peculiar and distinctive about the English nation as a result of which the laws which are applicable to it are applicable to no other?

CAPT. POYNTER: No, of course it applies to everybody.

MR. LONGPAST: What, then, does this come to? Here we all are, all the nations of the world, wondering how we shall be secure, and live at peace, and our advice to us is that we shall all be secure and live at peace when each of us is so much stronger than

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any of the others that nobody dare attack anybody else.

But apart from its logical absurdity, which I am quite prepared to believe may not strike you, hasn't the fallacy of what you propose been exposed twice already in my lifetime? Do you, after the experience of the last fifty years, still believe in being prepared for war as a recipe for avoiding it? I was brought up to think as you do. I can remember, for example, my maiden aunt telling me in 1913, when battleships were "all the go", how "We must build our fleet up to what they said they'd build theirs up to, if we build ours up." But after a lifetime of seeing expenditure on war preparations overtop year by year expenditure on any other single item—and at times all the other items put together—a lifetime of being continually told that we must build more battleships than Germany or more bombers than Germany or more fighters than Germany or more jets than Russia or more atom bombs than Russia, a lifetime which, in spite of our invariable acceptance of these injunctions, has seen the western world, including my own country which, if you are right, ought to have been trebly secure, engulfed in the two most terrible wars in history, and sees us now visibly overshadowed by the imminent prospect of another—after a lifetime, I say, of seeing these things, I simply can't subscribe to this doctrine any more. But tell me, does history have no effect on you at all?

CAPT. POYNTER: I'm no great reader myself. What history has taught me is that the weak go to the wall.

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MR. LONGPAST: A well-known doctrine but, I assure you, fallacious. I will show you why in a moment. I mentioned history only because I think that history makes it plain that wars scarcely, if ever, produce the results expected of them. You expect "pie in the sky" in the form of some Utopia—"a world fit for heroes", homes for everybody, jobs for everybody, universal disarmament, and so on, but all you get, as somebody said of the mild wars of the eighteenth century, are widows, taxes and wooden legs.

JONES: I once read a book by Norman Angell which showed that whoever might be the victors in a modern war, all the nations were, in fact, the losers, because the modern world is so completely one that an injury to one is, as Christ taught, literally an injury to all.

MR. LONGPAST: That's true enough, and Angell was very far-sighted man. There are, it is obvious, no victors in a modern war. But have you noticed, Poynter, with what paradoxical regularity wars produce not merely *bad* consequences, but consequences which are *precisely* the reverse of those which the people who went to war desired or intended.

CAPT. POYNTER: We intended victory over Germany and we got it.

MR. LONGPAST: Agreed, my dear chap, but that, really, isn't the end of the story. Since you will insist on taking our own country as your example, who was who chiefly promoted and encouraged and decided upon the war of 1914-18? The Conservative and Liberal parties; Labour, you will remember, was lukewarm

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when it was not actively Pacifist. Well, the effect of the war was to destroy the Liberal Party past recall and to destroy the whole order of society for which the Conservatives stood. Pacifist Labour, on the other hand, found that it gave an enormous fillip to the cause of Socialism.

Or take the 1939-45 war. Fought ostensibly and, think, genuinely for freedom, at any rate by us—the Nazi thing was horrible and I, for one, tried to get into the Home Guard in order to do my bit to fight it—it succeeded in its intention so far as the Nazis were concerned, only to see the triumph of a semi-Oriental despotism and the blotting out of freedom over half the world.

CAPT. POYNTER: You have a good deal to say for yourself, but one thing you don't say. What else is there? You keep generalising in the abstract but coming down to cold pie, do you think that we should leave ourselves defenceless, at the mercy of whoever chooses to attack us?

MR. LONGPAST: I do think that to have the courage to be weak is to-day the best policy for a nation, precisely because it is the safest. Unfortunately, a successful operation depends, as I hinted above, upon our first getting rid of the Empire.

WHITEMAN: Sir, if I may say so, what an extraordinary statement to make. How on earth can you say such a thing?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, look again at the teaching of history. Which throughout history, the history of Europe at any rate, the only one I know anything about

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which have been the nations who are always at war? The heavily armed nations, Russia and Prussia, Germany and France and England, and at one time when they were heavily armed, Sweden, Italy and Spain. These are the names that occur again and again in the history books as nations attacking, as nations being attacked, as nations forming alliances to prevent war, but, as being, nevertheless, constantly engaged in war. Again and again their lands are overrun, their cities destroyed, their fields ravaged, their peoples decimated and persecuted. These, then [Mr. Longpast grew emphatic] are the nations who were so nervous about their safety that they thought they could never be defended strongly enough.

And which, on the other hand, are the nations whose names are comparatively absent from the bloody annals of military history? The small, comparatively undefended nations, Switzerland and Portugal and Ireland and Norway and Denmark.

Now in the modern world, the world which, as we are continually being told, is a single whole, in which, as Jones has just reminded us, the nations are veritably members of one another, these lessons of history are underlined. Let us suppose that war breaks out. Which are the nations which have absolutely no chance of keeping out? Alas, we all know the answer. They are Russia and France and Germany and America and, above all, ourselves. All these, if war comes, are "for". Which, on the other hand, are the nations which have at least a sporting chance of keeping out?

WHITEMAN: None, I should think.

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MR. LONGPAST: I'm not so sure. If the last two wars are any guide, we should expect to find a number of small nations left out; in the last war, for example Sweden and Switzerland, Portugal and Eire. Hence, if you are small and comparatively undefended, you have at least a chance of avoiding war; if large and well defended, no chance at all.

CAPT. POYNTER: What about Norway and Denmark and Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and the Balkan States? All were small and all were overrun and occupied.

MR. LONGPAST: Just a moment. Denmark got off comparatively lightly. Norway, no doubt, "got it" very badly, but then Norway resisted. There is no point in *resisting*, if you are a small nation. But then I never said that small nations were safe, merely that they had a better chance of safety, whereas the large ones had none at all.

CAPT. POYNTER: You forget that the great thing is not to keep out of war but to fight if you are attacked. To fight and, if you can, to win.

MR. LONGPAST: Are you sure? The Russians were attacked; they fought and they won. Yet they suffered more than any other nation with some eight million casualties and the Lord knows how many torturing and rapings and forced deportations of the population. Wouldn't it have been better for them not to have been in the war at all? You ask the tortured and the raped. And surely the miseries of occupation suffered by non-resisting nations are as nothing to the horrors suffered by Eastern Germany when the Russians swept

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over it, carrying off the men to work in mines and forced labour camps and raping the women in their turn.

WHITEMAN: So what?

MR. LONGPAST: Why, that the primary duty of a statesman to-day is to keep his country out of war at all costs. But it isn't the case to-day, if indeed it ever was, that the best way of doing this is to maintain large forces with which to defend yourself, since these have the effect of alarming and provoking your neighbour. Now the possession of a large Empire involves, as I have already said, the maintenance of large forces to protect it. Therefore the sooner we are rid of our empire, the better.

Nellie Smart, who all this time had been sitting on a state, had grown impatient and, jumping down, seized her uncle by the arm. "Yes, Uncle," she said, "that's enough for now. Indeed, a good deal more than enough, to come along at once to the house. The Captain is coming, too," she added, looking him archly in the face. Capt. Poynter turned to Mr. Longpast. "Sir," he said, "I abominate your opinions but that doesn't prevent me from accepting your niece's very kind invitation to come to tea."

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That part of Hampshire in which Mr. Longpast's farm was situated was just within the nightingale radius. The nightingale, which is nice in its choice of habitat, confines itself so closely to the Home Counties that it might almost be said to have become a suburban bird. Bucks know it and Berkshire, and so do the Sussex and Kentish wealds, but its chief resort is Surrey where it makes its home on commons surrounded by the residences of commuters, that its chirrupings may be registered by B.B.C. technicians complete with recording units. It thus shows its happy sense of the tendency of the times, which is to bring the things of the country ever closer to the towns, and the things of the town ever closer to the country, until in God's good time both town and country are superseded by suburban garden cities.

The nightingale does, however, extend his area to embrace the extreme east of Hampshire, and during the warm nights of an early May, two pairs were putting up a fine display in the woods surrounding Folke Farm. The party at the Farm had taken out their chairs to hear them, and were sitting on the far corner

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of the lawn which was fringed by a copse. Miss Flightly, who had just inveigled the gentlemen into washing up, was sitting with them and descanting on the beauties of the night which was soft and moonless. “So warm,” she said it was, “so velvety. And the stars looked like jewels in a black velvet cloth.” Miss Flightly had an infallible instinct for the well-worn phrase. By her no stone of speech was left unturned, no avenue of *cliché* unexplored.

“Wouldn’t you say, rather,” he remarked, “like the advertisement signs that flash on and off in Piccadilly Circus, showing bottles pouring synthetic liquids into jewelled cups? So romantic, I always think!”

“Uncle, you are not to mock,” remonstrated Nellie.

MR. LONGPAST: How can I help it? I hate this world we are living in and all its works. It touches nothing that it doesn’t vulgarise.

MISS FLIGHTLY: I don’t see what’s wrong with the advertising signs. The crowds enjoy them and so do I.

MR. LONGPAST: But what crowds! I can remember when Leicester Square had style; when men in evening dress with opera hats concertinaed under their arms walked the streets, and when properly dressed women held up their skirts as they passed from carriage to theatre or restaurant. Now the place has become the prey of the working classes. Milk bars have taken the place of restaurants, cinemas of theatres, while fun fairs project their grisly enticements upon the pavements. Everybody looks alike, talks alike, dresses alike—their manners are abominable. Looking at the crowds

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on the pavements, you might think you were on Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday.

MR. CROSSMONS: And why not, pray? Why should the pleasures of the West End be denied to the masses of the people who, incidentally, do the work which make them possible?

MISS FLIGHTLY: I think you are rather hard, sir. Speaking for myself, I must say I have had some very nice times in Leicester Square on a Saturday night. There are always plenty of boys about ready to give you a drink and a ride in a taxi.

MR. LONGPAST: Americans, I suppose, with money to burn in their pockets. The place is lousy with them propping up the architecture and chewing the cud, as if they were cattle.

NELLIE: Well, what's the matter with Americans, Uncle? You always seem to be disapproving of somebody or other these days. Anyway, if you don't like the West End, there is no need for you to go there.

MR. CROSSMONS: What he doesn't like is other people enjoying the pleasures which he has outlived. So he calls sour grapes at them and pretends they aren't pleasant. You are feeling old, Longpast, that's what's the matter with you, you don't like it, and you want to take it out of somebody as usual.

MR. LONGPAST: I see you are all against me. I realise I must seem to you a disagreeable old curmudgeon. You say I'm getting old and that, no doubt is true. But I should put the trouble differently. I should prefer to say that having been adult before 1911 I still have some remembrance of quality and a belief

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in its worth—quality even in amusement. Some pleasures I have been taught to think, and am convinced, are better than others; there is such a thing as style, and it is style that seems to me to have gone out of this world of cinemas and milk bars and “quick ones” at the counter. I don’t disapprove of people enjoying themselves in the ways that appeal to them. I only point out that they aren’t such good ways as they might be and used to be. A good claret is better than a bad cocktail, even though its appeal isn’t so quick and easy.

MR. CROSSMONS: Still, more people can enjoy the cocktail. A taste for claret takes time to cultivate, and it isn’t easy for young people to cultivate it in these expensive days.

MR. LONGPAST: What none of you seem to realise is that there are some “goods” which can’t be indefinitely extended and remain good, and that this applies to pleasures.

MR. CROSSMONS: That’s a cryptic remark. What do you mean by it?

MR. LONGPAST: I mean that the Welfare State which seeks to extend its benefits to everybody, insofar as it succeeds, inevitably debases the value of the benefits.

NELLIE: Uncle, what *are* you talking about? Stop being so up-stage and give us an example.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, take cars. The purpose of a car is to enable you to travel from place to place quickly and in comfort; and up to a point it succeeds in this. But once the point is passed, the point at which too many people have cars, ~~they get in one~~

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another's way, and you find yourself travelling more slowly than you did before they were invented, while your nerves are frayed to the point of exasperation by blockages and traffic regulations. We have been talking about the West End; reflect upon the misery of driving through the West End on a Saturday night. Well now, in the ultimate development of the Welfare State everybody, I suppose, will have a car, with the result that our roads will be covered by a stationary mass of metal composed of vehicles stretched from John o' Groats to Land's End, in a single, solid, inextricable jam.

MR. CROSSMONS: Not a bit of it. We shall have relieved the congestion by helicopters long before that point is reached.

MR. LONGPAST: Only to fill the skies, as we have filled the roads, and to turn both into death-traps.

Or take education. In the old days a few enjoyed high quality education, while the masses received purely utilitarian instruction designed to fit them for some commercial or manual job. Now everybody aims at high quality education, everybody, that is, wants his son to go to a grammar school, and many of those who go to grammar schools want to go on to the universities, with the result that the standard goes down everywhere and the quality of education is no longer high.

MR. CROSSMONS: Sir, I challenge you to substantiate that.

MR. LONGPAST: Obvious enough, isn't it? The number that goes to the universities increases far more

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rapidly than the number of staff available to cope with them. Consequently classes grow larger and the personal contact between tutor and student which was the very core and essence of university education as I knew it, has to be abandoned. Or if it isn't quite abandoned, the wretched tutor has to cope with so many students that he grows tired and stale, and because he is always giving out, comes in the end to have nothing left to give. Have you, as a matter of interest, met in recent years an Oxford tutor towards the end of the Summer Term?

MR. CROSSMONS: I, sir? No.

MR. LONGPAST: When you do, he will remind you of nothing so much as a sucked orange. And who can wonder at it when one remembers that the poor devils are responsible for the tutoring of nearly eight thousand undergraduates as against some three thousand in our time. Nor is that all. Increasing numbers of undergraduates come from working-class homes in a sweating anxiety to declass themselves; they have no tradition of learning, no background of culture, no intellectual inheritance, so that the tutor has to do everything as it were from scratch. In London even the pretence has been abandoned and a student's relation to his supervisor is limited to going to his lectures in a shoal of fifty, a hundred or even two hundred and taking down the words that fall from his lips. To what, then, does the content of this giving of mass instruction amount? To the passage of a certain amount of examinationally utilitarian information from the notebooks of the lecturers to the notebooks of the students without

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passing through the minds of either. Now nobody could call *that* university education. We might as well be in America.

MR. CROSSMONS: But how are the masses to be properly educated unless they go to the university? Everybody at any rate should have the *chance* of going there, and I have no doubt that things will settle down and the numbers of practising teachers will gradually approximate more closely to the numbers of students, until in the end there will be enough.

MR. LONGPAST: But even if we were to grant you that—though, mind you, I don’t—has it occurred to you that there is such a thing as a right size—a right size for a pudding, a play or a poem? Take cooking. You know as well as I do that you can’t cook a decent meal for more than a dozen persons at the outside. Increase the diners beyond that number, and though you may multiply the cooks, the kitchens, the saucepans and the fires, you won’t get the same result. Well, it’s like that with a university and still more like that with a college. The right size for a college is about two hundred, which is small enough to enable anybody who wants to know anybody to know him, and large enough for anybody who wants not to be known by somebody successfully to avoid him. Increase the number above that figure and you substitute a heterogeneous collection, raw material for statisticians and Gallup polls, for a collective organism with a mind and spirit of its own.

NELLIE: Mr. Crossmons, I would like to ask you something.

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MR. CROSSMONS: Yes, my dear, what is it?

NELLIE: Why do you think that the masses, as you call them, ought to receive university education?

MR. CROSSMONS: In order that the treasure house of the world's wisdom, knowledge and beauty, of which for so many centuries a tiny proportion of mankind has held the key, may be at last unlocked for the benefit of all. Thus ordinary men will know for the first time what great men and women have said and thought memorably about life, and will be enabled to perceive more beauty, more passion, more scope for their sympathy and understanding in the world than they saw before.

NELLIE: You are very eloquent, Mr. Crossmons.

MR. CROSSMONS: It is a theme, my dear young lady, whose inspiration might make anybody eloquent.

NELLIE: But what it comes to is that you think the masses ought to have culture. Now why do you suppose that they want culture or even need it?

MR. CROSSMONS: I think that we all of us have an inborn tendency to love the highest according to our lights when we see it. What's more, I think we ought all to be given the chance to see it, which means education.

NELLIE (to Miss Flightly): You don't want to be shown the highest, do you Nancy?

NANCY: No I don't. All I want is to have a good time, which doesn't mean culture as I understand it, but a nice boy to take me about to dances.

NELLIE: You know, Mr. Crossmons, I don't believe most people do want the highest or, indeed, trouble

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themselves about it one way or the other. Look at our own class, most of whose members have enjoyed the educational advantages of which you speak so eloquently. What were the things which you said the cultured do? One was knowing what great men and women have thought and said memorably about life—well go and look at the members of our class sitting in the evening train from Waterloo to Guildford or from Victoria to Croydon. What are they reading? The evening papers. How many are reading books at all? Five per cent—I counted them the other day. How many are reading great books? A half per cent. As for loving the highest when they see it, they are much more likely to heave a brick at it. Think how they hate the Third Programme; consider the scorn which they feel for the “intellectual”; and with what inflections of fear and contempt do they pronounce the words “brainy” or “highbrow”.

MR. LONGPAST: Bravo, Nellie. Of course you’re right.

MR. CROSSMONS: Right, maybe, about the bourgeois middle class who, God knows, are decadent enough, but not about the workers who have always been shut out from these things.

MR. LONGPAST: Am I to understand you to suggest that just because they are born into working-class homes, that is to say, just because their fathers have earned their living by hand and muscle rather than by brain, by sweat rather than by ink, human beings nourish a natural longing for the beautiful, the true and the good which is absent from those who come from the middle classes?

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MISS FLIGHTLY (To Mr. Crossmons): It isn't true. All the American boys I have known have liked hot jazz and hot dogs and drink whisky. The English boys talk about football and sport and drink beer, and none of them read anything at all but the comics and sometimes the Sunday paper.

MR. CROSSMONS: They never had the chance of anything better.

MR. LONGPAST: Come off it, Crossmons! I have no doubt at all that the world which is desired by the class-conscious miner is very much like the world which is enjoyed by the Tory ex-mine-owner. The miner has no quarrel with that world. He likes it very well. All he wants is a different division of its spoils. The workers' idea of Utopia isn't a world made over anew in the image of the true, the good and the beautiful, but a world like this one, with the sole difference that he has stepped into the rich man's shoes. That is the face of his ideal, and it isn't very difficult to discern its features. A late breakfast of two or three courses, a day devoted largely to watching other people play games or watching horses or motor cyclists or dogs run races, interspersed with an occasional round of golf, dinner in a smart restaurant with plenty of whisky, an evening with a girl at the movies or the boxing ring, and a hatred of foreigners, artists, scholars and highbrows. Nothing very much in the way of culture here. Now *that*, I suggest to you, Crossmons, is the ideal of nine Englishmen out of ten, rich or poor, educated or uneducated.

ALI: It is true, sir.

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MR. CROSSMONS: Why, Ali, what do you know about it?

ALI: Well, before I came to England I studied English Literature in the University at Lahore, and a very wonderful literature it is, sir, Shakespeare and Milton and Wordsworth and Dr. Johnson and Swift and Sir Thomas Browne—I read them all, sir. And I read some of the philosophers too, Berkeley and Hume and John Stuart Mill. It is wonderful, John Stuart Mill’s essay on *Liberty*. It makes me so happy and it makes my countrymen so happy, but it made us wonder why we couldn’t have our own government when we wanted to.

MR. CROSSMONS: Well, you have now, thanks to the Labour Government.

ALI: I know, sir, and I am sure we are very grateful to your government for letting us have our own. I’m afraid we were becoming a bit of a handful, sir, owing to being kept out of it so long. Perhaps your Government thought we might have got out of hand altogether.

Well, sir, as I was saying, through reading all this literature I thought that the English were a very wonderful people, very wonderful indeed. Then, when I first came to England, I stayed in a boarding-house near Paddington. Well, sir, the people! I don’t think I was silly enough to expect them to talk quite like Shakespeare and Sir Thomas Browne, or to be deep thinkers like Hume or Berkeley, but, sir, I did expect them to be of the same species, so that I could recognise them as being the fellow-countrymen of these great men and the inheritors of their wisdom. But, sir, there was nothing in common—nothing at all. The men talked

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about the weather and sport and football and what they had read in the papers; the women talked about dress and gossiped about other women and film stars. Oh, sir, I was surprised; and disappointed, sir.

MR. LONGPAST: Now Crossmons, you know what the English are really like, straight from the horse's mouth. But to return to the question of the culture-hungry workers, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. You have already laid the foundations of your Welfare State, the State which bears upon it the imprint of the workers whose needs it expresses, whose welfare it promotes, tell me frankly what you think of it, as far as you have gone. Are you satisfied?

MR. CROSSMONS: I think very well of it. I see a community from which gross poverty has disappeared and in which everybody who wants a job has a job, a community in which there is provision for the sick and the aged, in which the unemployed are provided for, in which children are educated and if necessary fed by the State. I see people healthier, better fed, better clothed, than they have ever been. I know the figures which show how much taller and heavier children are. Above all, the gross inequalities and injustices of society have been ironed out so that it is no longer true to-day that a baby born in a Durham mining village has about half the expectation of life of a baby born in a Bournemouth nursing home. Now all these things are the result of State action which has been deliberately taken to improve the lot of the people.

MR. LONGPAST: I dare say, I dare say. You have given them bread of a sort, but at what cost to the spirit.

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MR. CROSSMONS: Fiddlesticks, we have liberated their minds and spirits, by freeing them from want and the fear of want.

MR. LONGPAST: If you have, you have succeeded in inducing a wonderful uniformity among these liberated spirits. Never, as I said before, have people been so much alike—wearing the same clothes, behaving with the same manners or the lack of them, thinking the same thoughts, attending the same amusements, smoking the same cigarettes, admiring the same film stars and using the same cosmetics, to such an extent that you can excuse a young man to-day for getting engaged to two or three different girls at the same time in the belief that they are all the same girl. Ali was talking a moment ago of John Stuart Mill. Well, I think Mill was right when he said that what made life interesting and communities valuable was not uniformity but difference; the difference between man and man, minds and minds, things and things. Now nearly all the things that I knew in my boyhood that made life different and, therefore, interesting, have disappeared.

NELLIE: What sort of things, Uncle?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, I think chiefly of humble little things like winkles for tea; bread—we were speaking, weren't we, of giving the workers bread?—whose crust was burnt. Oh, those delicious black burnt crusts of my boyhood; they were wonderful with the crumb pared off and spread with butter, but real butter not the tasteless mixture you get to-day. Loaves then were different shapes and sizes. Now they all look alike

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There were different kinds of cheese, Wensleydale and Stilton and Cheddar instead of the everlasting, universal, tasteless Canadian mousetrap. There were crumpets for tea. Do you remember, Crossmons, the muffin man going down the street on a Sunday afternoon?

MR. CROSSMONS: Can you think only of food?

MR. LONGPAST: All right then. What about footpaths—now nearly all ploughed up; green bridle tracks, now foundrous for the most part and choked with reeds and brambles; country lanes with varied and varying surfaces transformed into the universal motor roads with their universal black tarmac; sheep on the downs; copses with different kinds of trees—in fact all the vast variety of English trees, instead of the uniform blankets of regimented conifers planted by the Forestry Commission.

MR. CROSSMONS: Well, you still have English trees.

MR. LONGPAST: Have we? What we have, and have increasingly, are conifers—pines and Douglas firs and Sitka spruces, horrible alien things, fit for the Swedish, Russian and Canadian countrysides from which, presumably, they come. Everywhere the loathed Forestry Commission plants these horrible trees. They blur the clean outlines of the Lakeland hills; they sprout on their bare slopes till the hillsides look like ill-shaved skins; everywhere they are taking the place of the native oak and ash and beech. Since the war, the Forestry Commission has planted ten softwood trees for one hardwood.

MR. CROSSMONS: But why this rage against conifers? I see no particular harm in them.

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MR. LONGPAST: A townsman who spends his life sitting on Committees wouldn't. Well, here are three objections. There is no undergrowth in pine woods, no bushes and practically no flowers. There is no animal life in pine woods; pine woods are dead. No bird sings in pine woods; pine woods are silent. When the wood-land of England is all pines, you won't hear any nightingales. Finally, to all appearance, pine woods are the same in spring as they are in autumn; also, though I don't expect you to appreciate this, this appearance is utterly alien to an English landscape, and ruins it.

MR. CROSSMONS: I think you are harsh and exaggerate absurdly. Many people like pine woods—

MR. LONGPAST: Only townsmen—

MR. CROSSMONS: And I am sure that there is plenty of wild life in them, even though I'm not naturalist enough to be able to tell you what it is.

MR. LONGPAST: But *I* can tell *you*. Take poor Hudson—W. H. Hudson, you know, the great naturalist who wrote that lovely prose—beats Richard Jefferies into a cocked hat! Have you read *Green Mansions* [Mr. Crossmons shook his head] or *The Crystal Age* [another shake]. You ought to in your rôle of social planner and reformer. It's the most intelligent vision of man's future that has come my way—melancholy, mysterious, extremely exciting, but above all, beautiful. Well, as I was saying, when poor Hudson got T. he had to go and live in a sanatorium in a pine wood. If there had been any wild life there you can bet your boots that Hudson would have discovered it, but he could find to observe were the ants.

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But talking of visions of the future, shall I reveal to you my vision of the future of your Welfare State?

MR. CROSSMONS: Some frightful caricature, I don't doubt.

MR. LONGPAST (raptly): I can see an England in which whatever land is left over from cultivation is covered with a network of golf courses, tennis courts, running tracks, dirt tracks, speed tracks, aerodromes, helicopter stations or whatever kind of ground the popular sports of the future demand. Our coast will be lined with a continuous series of resorts in which radio and television will discourse negroid music and present pugilistic encounters to tired “sportsmen” on holiday and their over-nourished wives. Our roads, as I said before, will be covered with a single stationary block of jammed cars stretching from John o' Groats to Land's End. A deluge of news, warranted not to excite thought and carefully chewed so as not to arouse comment, will descend upon the defenceless heads of the community through every device of communication that the science of the future may have been able to contrive. Probably by that time the doctors will have learned to insert into the skulls of babies small radio sets, so that their minds will be in receipt of constant intimations from the “authorities” as to what they should think and not think, what they should like and not like, what they should feel and not feel. Man, having plundered nature to satisfy every need of his body, will have made no provision for the needs of his soul. To minister to these needs innumerable creeds and cults will spring up like mushrooms overnight. I can

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see long lines of women following Great White Masters into the desert. . . . And just to bring all this back to the point at which we started, scattered here and there through the sprawling suburb studded with preserved beauty spots which stretches from London to the coast, a few commons and copses will be retained in which nightingales will sing, surrounded by young men with radio sets relaying their song to the listening millions. Indeed, I'm not sure that by that time it will not have proved possible to present the nightingale on TV, though I have some fears lest "viewers"—that is what I believe the addicts of television are called—will be disappointed by such an insignificant-looking little brown bird. Anyway, you will be able to feel comforted about the future of a Welfare State that still supports the nightingale.

MR. CROSSMONS: You have produced, as I expected, nothing but a caricature. It is a caricature because of what it puts in but even more because of what it leaves out.

MR. LONGPAST: What have I left out?

MR. CROSSMONS: You have left out all the solid advances we have made during the last fifty years in ridding people of want and the fear of want; the improvements in quality and length of life, the freedom from illness and fear. What we have done is to enable great masses of the people to live better, fuller and freer lives than they have ever lived before in the history of mankind.

MR. LONGPAST (reflectively): I wonder if that's true.

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MR. CROSSMONS: Of course it's true. Look back over story for a moment and reflect how squalid has been the human lot. Men's lives have been oppressed by forces which they could neither control nor understand, forces of fire and flood, of earthquake and drought. In the sweat of their brows they have wrung a meagre existence from nature. Or they have toiled long hours in field and factory, in mine and workshop, making profits for somebody else. Most human beings who have ever lived haven't known where their next meal was coming from. What they have known is that, when it did come, it wouldn't be a square one. Now, thanks to human skill and planning, most of these external enemies to men's happiness have been overcome or are in a fair way to being overcome. In a hundred ways science has lightened and brightened the life of man. It has enormously increased our output of commodities, our speed of movement and of transport. It has relieved our pain and extended beyond all expectation the span of our lives. It has done much to free us from disease; it has lighted our homes and paved and drained our streets; it has given us a sanitary system—for the first time in history, most human beings have ceased to stink. Above all, it has enabled us to remove the gross injustices of society, so that the luxury and ostentation of the few no longer outrage the misery and indigence of the many. Now all these benefits have been made available for the first time for the people of this country as a whole and not for a privileged few. We call the process social justice; we speak of “fair shares for all”. And that precisely is

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what the Welfare State means. You, living outside the stream of present events and knowing little about the contemporary world, say nothing about these things. You omit entirely from your absurd picture any mention of this great advance that has been made in man's ease and safety and comfort, and therefore in his freedom to live his life as he pleases.

NELLIE: He is right, Uncle, and very eloquent too.

MR. LONGPAST (contritely): Well, I suppose that on balance he is; the greatest happiness of the greatest number and a gilded sty for everybody. Well, I suppose that's all they are fit for.

MISS FLIGHTLY: I would like to say something. I heard my grandmother talking the other day—she is a very old lady; eighty-three, and a lot of us were there for her birthday. They were saying, like Mr. Crossmons, what wonderful improvements she must have seen in her lifetime—you know, radio, electric light, telephones, roads, motor-cars, hospitals, anaesthetics, and the rest. She was funny about it.

MR. CROSSMONS: What do you mean by “funny”?

MISS FLIGHTLY: Well, she didn't seem quite so set up by these things as she ought to have been. She said the motor-cars killed a lot of people and brought them swarming out of the towns to make a mess of the country where she lived. She said she was afraid now to go out into the road. Also she said that if it weren't for what she called the petrol engine she didn't suppose there would be any aeroplanes to drop bombs.

NELLIE: I wonder what she had against the telephone?

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MISS FLIGHTLY: Somebody asked her that and she said that it helped idle people to waste a lot of time chattering to each other about nothing; oh yes, and it condemned a lot of nice girls to sit down day after day all day on their backsides with things screwed on their ears listening to other people's silly talk.

MR. CROSSMONS: But surely she must have enjoyed the wireless.

MISS FLIGHTLY: Well, she said she listened to it sometimes, but she didn't like light music and most of it *was* light music, crooning and so forth. She said it came oozing out of the receiver like a stream of treacle—that was what she said. She complained that there weren't any real tunes such as she used to sing when she was a girl. She wanted to know why to-day there weren't any songs with a good chorus like "Ta-ra-boom-de-ay", "Daisy, Daisy", and "I do like to be beside the Seaside".

MR. CROSSMONS: That seems to me to raise a different point. I agree that the light music is hideous. But I don't know how even she could find fault with the electric light. What a lot of labour it saves, and so cheap too.

MR. LONGPAST: Don't you? Well, I do. It's just the cheapness that is the snag. Again and again I have read about poor devils being held for investigation in prisons in Iron Curtain countries, and how one of the commonest methods of wearing down their nerves and breaking down their resistance is never to let them be in the dark. They are put in cells where the pitiless glare of unshaded electric bulbs beats down day and

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night. So you see I can perfectly well understand how there can be drawbacks even to electric light. [To Miss Flightly] But didn't your grandmother approve wholeheartedly of anything that has been done in her lifetime?

MISS FLIGHTLY: Oh yes, she mentioned several things. One of them was perforated stamps. When she was a girl you bought a big sheet of stamps and then cut the stamps out with a pair of scissors. Perforated stamps, she said, were so much easier and quicker to detach and stick on. Then there were coat-hangers for men's coats. There used to be only those little loops at the back of the coat which are always breaking through and having to be sewn up.

MR. LONGPAST: What else?

MISS FLIGHTLY: Well, she included zip-fasteners which, she said, saved such a lot of sewing on of buttons.

NELLIE: I'm not sure that I agree with her about them; I have known occasions when zip-fasteners have been very inconvenient. I have even known them actively painful.

MISS FLIGHTLY (archly): Well, you must remember, dear, that my grandmother is a very old lady and probably doesn't know about the occasions. I don't suppose that she ever did, but if she did, she has forgotten them.

NELLIE (with asperity): How dare you imply I am thinking of what you are thinking of. As a matter of fact, I am thinking of something quite different.

MR. CROSSMONS: Ladies, ladies!

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MR. LONGPAST: Well, I suppose ladies will be ladies. To Miss Flightly] Anything else?

MISS FLIGHTLY: Yes. She said trolley-buses instead of trams—so much quicker and quieter. You see, she used to live in High Street, Islington, where the trams made a terrible rattling noise as they went over the joints. Such lots of them, too.

And then she had a funny one—ice-cream. That’s the way she remembers it—she chuckled when she mentioned it—nice young men in the streets with little carts and triecycles. Delicious, she called it, and so healthy.

MR. CROSSMONS: I wonder how much those young men were paid; anyway, it’s a damned dull job. I don’t think we can pass modern methods of ice-cream distribution as an unmixed blessing, if only because they brought such jobs into existence.

MR. LONGPAST: Perhaps not, but it’s an interesting list—interesting not so much because of what it puts in, though I must say I was intrigued by the perforated stamps, as because of what it leaves out. None of the big things, the motor, the radio, the cinema, the television, the aeroplane, the refrigerator, the things we say have revolutionised our world, even get a mention. All, presumably, are dismissed as double-edged which, of course, they are. We move here in a world of little, humble things, zip-fasteners and coat-hangers and perforated stamps. The list makes one pensive.

MR. CROSSMONS: What does it make you pensive about?

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MR. LONGPAST: Why, progress, of course. Has the world really got better or man's life happier because of his immense cleverness of invention?

NELLIE: But Uncle, you shouldn't judge just by one old woman's list. I can think of all sorts of things that can be added to it.

MR. LONGPAST: Of what, for instance?

NELLIE: Well, to add something very much on her own level, what about gum-boots—Wellingtons? What a revolution they have made in farm work. Bill Crane, who is, as you know, nearly seventy-four, told me how nearly every old man in the country when he was a young man, and, indeed, during most of his lifetime, was crippled by rheumatism and arthritis before he was sixty. Why? Because for large parts of their working life they were working with their feet wet. Even the strongest boots and gaiters let in the wet after a time, and, of course, they couldn't afford always to have them strong and new. But now pretty well all the farm workers wear Wellingtons and work with dry feet; as a consequence they don't get rheumatism and arthritis.

MR. CROSSMONS: Good for you, Mrs. Smart. Of course you are right, and the illustration is right on the spot.

NELLIE: Yes, but that after all is only an example on the level of the old lady's own list. But why should we have to stick to that level? I can think of one thing that has completely altered people's outlook on life and that is the relief of pain. Oh, of course I know that people still have pain but it's nothing to what they used to have. Just take going to the dentist,

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for example. *You* yourself have told me, Uncle turning to Mr. Longpast] how you hated gas when you were a boy. They put a sort of rubber bag over your face, didn't they?

MR. LONGPAST: Yes, and it stank abominably.

MISS FLIGHTLY: Well, it's a pleasure now, I assure you, sir. They send you a pill the night before to give you nice dreams; they inject that lovely stuff into your arm so that you feel yourself going to sleep and loving the anaesthetist as you go, and hoping you are going to wake him with you. What they do after that I don't know. All I do know is that I have lovely dreams, usually of the anaesthetist, and that when I wake up it's all over.

NELLIE: Uncle, you must admit that *that's* an advance.

MR. LONGPAST: All right, I admit it, though it does seem to engender erotic fervour in our Nancy. But even so and for all that I, for my part, would sooner be living sixty years ago before progress really happened.

MR. CROSSMONS: Even if you were working class?

MR. LONGPAST: I can't imagine myself being working class and don't propose to try. And now I will tell you a secret. You may think I have been talking rather a lot. [Polite murmurs of “Certainly not”, “Oh no, Uncle, you never do that”, “Not at all, Longpast”.] And talking through my hat.

MR. CROSSMONS (sotto voce): That you certainly *have*. It's the only use you have for your hats.

MR. LONGPAST: But I assure you that it has all been one for a purpose—making the nightingales sing. They

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love the sound of the human voice, and the more you talk the more they sing. I noticed that they did sing beautifully while we have been talking.

MR. CROSSMONS: Perhaps they did. I never heard them owing to the barrage of talk.

MR. LONGPAST: Sorry, I seem to have overdone it this time, but I think I'd better go to bed. It's the village outing to-morrow and I have to be up early.

ALI: Before you go, sir, I'd like to say just one thing.

MR. LONGPAST: Oh Ali, I'd forgotten you were there. Say away. What is it?

ALI: Well, sir, this outing and *fête*; it is a holiday, is it not?

MR. LONGPAST: Yes it is, Ali.

ALI: Well, sir, there aren't any holidays in Pakistan. People are too poor to have them. And, sir, I don't know much about it, but I don't think that there were holidays here, except the few bank-holidays, fifty years ago.

MR. CROSSMONS: There certainly weren't for most people.

ALI (to Mr. Longpast): Well, sir, isn't that an advance?

But Mr. Longpast, growling that it depended on what people did with their holidays, was already on his way to bed.

IV

The Fête and the Lunch

The next day, as Mr. Longpast had said, was the day of the village fête or "outing", as it was generally called. All the party staying at Folly Farm had decided to go, with the exception of Mr. Longpast and his old friend Mr. Deepfeed who had come down two days before with a somewhat vague notion at the back of his mind of helping on the farm. As, however, Mr. Deepfeed was well on in the fifties, and his major activities were eating and drinking, the amount of work which he had actually succeeded in doing was not impressive. In view of his age and the nature of these activities, it would probably in any event have been small, but it so happened that on the morning of his arrival he had met with an unfortunate accident which had kept him out of farm activities and social life ever since. Asking to be given some light farm work, he was sent out with the tractor and the trailer to rake up the remnants of a silage mixture which the hay sweep had left behind, and to add them to the silage pit—"picking up the rakings", the job was called. Mr. Longpast himself was driving the tractor and trailer which had been fitted with two tall end-pieces to enable

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it to be piled high with the silage rakings. Michael Whiteman, who had so vigorously upheld the eternal political verities, the rights of Empire and the ruling mission of the white race against the heresies of Jones, was sitting with Mr. Deepfeed on the trailer. As the tractor drove along the side of the field by the hedge, the overhanging branch of a tree caught one of the end-pieces and sent it crashing down on the trailer. It caught Mr. Deepfeed fair and square on the back of the head, knocking him off the trailer and raising a bump the size of a golf ball. Michael, too, was knocked off the trailer and lay on the ground suffering from a slight concussion. Mr. Longpast, wholly unaware of what was happening behind him, drove serenely on, leaving the two wounded, as Mr. Deepfeed subsequently remarked, "lying untended on the field as in pre-Florence Nightingale days". When at last they were discovered, the two casualties were brought back to the farm and sent to bed. The doctor pronounced that no great harm had been done, but advised total rest for a couple of days, which was the reason for their absence from the group that had out-talked the nightingales on the previous evening.

No one derived greater satisfaction from the accident than Miss Flightly. Michael was a fine figure of a young man, twenty-two years of age and at the top of his power as an athlete. He was an assiduous cross-country runner and after a full day's work on the farm would go off for a four or five-mile run, choosing ploughed fields where possible and not omitting to ascend the steep northern slope of the Downs, in training for a

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thcoming club contest in London. He carried the bits of the running track into private life, being ever seen to walk but always doing everything at the able. Born in Australia, he could climb trees like a monkey, using his bare hands and feet to shinny up the smoothest trunk. In point of fact, he habitually went barefoot even in snow, in which he took the usual colonial's delight. He was a fine swimmer, specialising in the exhausting butterfly stroke, and it was the sight of his muscular young body beating its way up the river against the current which had first stimulated the susceptible interest of Miss Flightly, and was the source of her satisfaction in his condition as a patient. There was that strong, beautiful body lying in bed under her sole charge and discretion. . . .

Now that he was up and about Miss Flightly was still his inseparable attendant. Together they walked down to the buses, sat side by side on the same seat and shared a common luncheon packet. Michael, it is clear, had made a conquest of the impressionable young lady, though Michael himself gave the impression rather of being taken by storm than of being permanently occupied.

As to the fête itself, it was less a fête than, as has already been said, an outing. Michael, who entertained the colonist's ordinary notions about the English countryside, and Mr. Crossmons, who had been nurtured on Hardy, had been talking of village sports, May Queens, maypoles and dancing on the green to the home-made music of the village fiddlers. As the afternoon dusk fell, the fun would wax fast and furious

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until couples gradually separated themselves from the throng and wandered off hand in hand down the dark lanes. Nothing, Mr. Longpast assured them, could be farther from the facts.

MR. LONGPAST: Village sports and games are now extinct with the exception, of course, of the village football and cricket teams. What is more, the villagers are quite unable to amuse themselves. Just as much as townspeople are they dependent on the radio and the cinema.

MICHAEL: But there is no cinema in Farley village.

MR. LONGPAST: No, but there are buses to take people to Petersfield and to Alton, so most of the villagers go twice a week to the cinema, once in Petersfield and once in Alton, just as they would do if they lived in a town.

MR. CROSSMONS: But why do you say they can't amuse themselves? I thought village people spent most of their spare time working in their gardens.

MR. LONGPAST: The older ones do, but not the young men. Their one idea is to get on a motor-bike—most of them have motor-bikes—after they have done their day's work on the farm, in the quarry or on "the building" and get away to the nearest town. There they crowd through clicking turnstiles, put metal coins in slots, queue to hear photographs speak and sing, crowd into dance halls, paying somebody else to do for them the entertaining they can't now do for themselves, just like their neighbours in the towns. Indeed, their outlook, their pursuits, their conception of the

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ood life, differ to-day in no important respects from those of the townsman.

MR. CROSSMONS: And what about the country amusements that one reads about in books—the harvest home, the singing and the merry-making as the last waggon—or I suppose it should be the last trailer load—of corn is brought into the farm, the supper provided by the farmer, the long tables groaning—groaning I believe is the correct word—under the plates of cold roast beef and cold roast pork, the jars of pickles, the tankards of beer, the gooseberry pies, the singing by half-inebriated soloists of country songs with roaring choruses, and everybody joining in?

MR. DEEFEEED: The picture, in a word, of a self-sufficient community subsisting on its own produce, providing its own merry-making and its own sports and amusements—its members joined together by a community of interest and the fellowship of hard work.

MR. LONGPAST: What, in fact, of the traditional Merrie England of the harvest field—*Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Farmer's Glory* and all that. Well, it's my namesake—long past. Nothing of it survives to-day. The farmer has to pay out far too much in wages to be able to afford free beef and beer or free anything else, even if the beef were obtainable, which it isn't. As for the labourers, what they want when the day's work is done is not to be hanging about the farm or drinking with the men they meet every day and all the day—they see quite enough of them as it is—what they want is to be off and away. Besides,

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you must remember they all have at least a fortnight's holiday now, and directly the harvest is over, off they go to some seaside town, whither, of course, to-day's outing is likewise bound.

Thank God, Deepfeed, you and I haven't to face two or three dreary hours in a bus for the privilege of eating egg sandwiches on a crowded beach. We will stay behind and look after the animals. But I suggest we stroll down to the village and see the party start.

They all walked down to the village where they found five newly painted motor-buses drawn up in a splendid array, swarming with mothers, fathers and children, all bound for Bognor Regis. A provisional time-table had been drawn up for the day's activities. The party would arrive at 11.30, whence they would repair straight to the beach where, if no party of beach performers could be found to amuse them, most of the villagers would proceed to strip off those of their garments whose removal would conform with the requirements of decency if not, alas, with the dictates of charm. Few would enter the sea because few could swim, but the children would paddle, dig in the sand and generally enjoy themselves. They would then carry themselves and their sandwiches to a café where the sandwiches would be consumed together with potato crisps and "cuppas" provided by the café. The men meanwhile, would be drinking beer in the "local". In the afternoon a few would go on to the pier where they would insert pennies in the innumerable slot machines with which the pier was lined; others would listen to the band and others, again, would watch the

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fishermen not catching fish. The great majority, however, would begin to queue up for the cinema.

MICHAEL (to whom this time-table had been communicated): But didn't you say, sir, that they went to the cinema locally, in Petersfield and Alton, twice a week?

MR. LONGPAST: Certainly, I did, but what of it? This will be a different cinema and how, anyway, is one to get through a day's holiday without going to the movies? Moreover, by the time they come out the clubs will be open and these will take care of the married men. The young men will walk about aggressively on the promenade looking at the girls. The girls, they have boy friends, will proudly display them. If not, they will hang about hoping to be picked up. The mothers and children, by now tired out and pretty peevish, will begin to congregate round the buses waiting to be taken home. That's the day's outing. You see what enormous advantages the mobility of modern transport has conferred upon our hitherto isolated villages. It has broken down their isolation and opened up the village to the world; it has made the pleasures of the suburb and the seaside available to the most remote country dwellers, and country folk free of all the pleasures with which science and the Welfare State have enriched mankind.

Just as the buses were due to start, Capt. Poynter made his appearance. He seemed at first a little disconcerted to find the whole Folly Farm party gathered to see the outing depart, but putting a bold face on he went up to Mr. Longpast, shook hands with him

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and hoped that he was going to join the party. "Not at all, not at all," Mr. Longpast replied. "Indeed, the fact that I am staying at home makes your presence doubly welcome since now I shall be able to hand Nellie over to your care knowing that she will be in good hands."

CAPT. POYNTER (embarrassed): I hope, sir, my friendship with Mrs. Smart gives you no cause for concern.

MR. LONGPAST: Cause for concern? My dear chap, I haven't the faintest idea what you mean. What cause for concern could I have?

CAPT. POYNTER: Well, sir, I have sometimes thought that you thought that my relation with your niece might not be strictly honourable or such as an uncle could approve. I would like to assure you, sir, that it is.

MR. LONGPAST: I don't understand this Victorian language. It is so long since I heard it that I really forget what it means. I take it that as Nellie is an undeniably attractive young woman you would like to make love to her and have probably already done so, and that since there is nobody to stop you, you have every intention of doing it again to-day—which is why, I take it, you are preparing to go with her on this preposterous outing. If she doesn't come back till to-morrow or the next day I shall assume that she is staying with you; that is, I shall assume the worst.

CAPT. POYNTER (very disconcerted): I can assure you, sir, nothing is further from my thoughts. I have never thought of your niece in that way at all.

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MR. LONGPAST (pretending to be affronted): Really, I never heard anything so shameful. Here is my niece, as pretty as paint, and you say you never thought of her "in that way", by which ambiguous expression I take you to mean that you never thought of her as a sexually attractive young woman? If I believed for one moment what you say, I should regard your attitude as damnably insulting. How dare you not find my niece attractive?

NELLIE: Oh, stop making fun of him, Uncle, he doesn't know how to take it, poor chap.

MR. LONGPAST: Then he shouldn't insult my intelligence by trying to take me in with his ridiculous assertions about not wanting you and having strictly honourable intentions and all the rest of his nonsense.

NELLIE: All right, all right, Uncle. Now let him go. You can see for yourself that he is only a poor, dumb doggy-man who isn't used to this kind of thing.

MR. LONGPAST (to Poynter): You hear what Nellie says. I am not to tell you the truth any more, so get away with you into the bus and take Nellie with you. I shall expect you back when I see you.

CAPT. POYNTER (overcome with confusion): Thank you very much, Longpast, thank you very much indeed. We shall, of course, be back with the others.

The buses departed, and Mr. Longpast walked back to the farm with his old friend, Mr. Deepfeed. The women having gone for the day and the two old men leaving the house to themselves, they immediately made for the kitchen where they set about their preparations for a long-looked-for gastronomic event. As

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has been mentioned already, Mr. Longpast was an addict of the pleasures of the table. The hope that in an age of scientific feeding and of the worst cooking that a civilised country has ever known, he would be able to get his teeth at least occasionally into a good square meal had, indeed, played a large part in originally inducing Mr. Longpast to take a farm. He had had visions of his own roast pork, of great hams, of ham (not bacon) and eggs, of roast lamb, of barons of beef, even of saddles of mutton. . . .

Needless to say, his hopes had been largely disappointed. Eggs there were in plenty and milk, but with milk at its present price, it was rarely that Mr. Longpast got his heart high enough to commission the making of butter, while the separation of the necessary milk for cream was regarded as an unnecessary and tiresome frill in the already short-staffed cowsheds. As for calves and pigs, the number he was allowed to kill for his own purposes was strictly limited and of sheep and lambs there were none. Moreover in London, as he ruefully reflected, you are out for at least half your meals, which means that there is more to eat on the occasions when you are at home. At the farm you were in for every meal, and constant ingenuity was required on the part of the cook to ek out the scanty raw materials available so as to produce meals that seemed varied and were tasty. Mr. Longpast's horror of starchy food, of the whole tribe of British cakes and scones and bread puddings and pastry, unless made with great delicacy and plenty of fat—he was not, he kept pointing out, a schoolboy who

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stomach required to be filled as full and as rapidly as possible—only increased the difficulty of feeding him, nor was it lessened by his indiscriminate ban on all the products of the new Ice and Tin Age.

While Mr. Longpast numbered food and drink among the few remaining principal pleasures of the old, Mr. Deepfeed recognised no others. A confirmed gastronome, he devoted his life to the pleasures of the palate. Difficulties only sharpened his appetite and gave zest to his enjoyment. To all suggestions that he should leave England and go to live in France he turned a deaf ear, alleging that in France one was batting on too easy a gastronomic wicket for runs to be worth making. The great thing was to make one's runs in a country where there was little enough to eat and practically no one left who knew how to cook what there was. As to wine, didn't each country in these days export its best, England her cars and her high-grade china pots, France her wines? The most that he would permit himself in this direction was an occasional aeroplane trip to Paris for lunch. He would always come back either the same day or the next morning. In favour of the next morning was the fact that you got a dinner as well as a lunch in France; in favour of the same day was the fact that, suffering as he did from confirmed "Englishman's stomach", he couldn't always manage two proper meals a day and rarely did justice to his dinner.

As an old friend of Mr. Longpast's, on his occasional visits to the farm he always brought a hamper of carefully chosen food. The wines were Mr. Longpast's

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responsibility. Both men knew something of the elements of cooking, and as they prepared their meal talked at length and with relish on the evergreen subject of English food and those who prepared it.

MR. DEEPFEED: Extraordinary, the interest there is now in cooking. Radio talks, television talks—tho chap Harben telling us and even showing us how to do it, and God knows how many books appearing week by week from the publishers—*Cooking in the Flat, Tasty Meals for Two, Pressure Cooking, Dinner in Half an Hour, Mrs. Beeton Up to Date, Meals for the Working Woman*—all undertaking to tell you how to turn out tasty meals in no time and with no trouble.

MR. LONGPAST: I know, and have you noticed how with the issue of each fresh set of instructions telling English women how to perform, the level of performance drops another peg or two?

MR. DEEPFEED (reflectively): That, I suppose, is what is meant by expressing in literature what you don't in life.

MR. LONGPAST: The vice of the academic man—not exactly what you would have expected to find in English housewives, so practical, so adaptable, so very much *terre à terre*.

MR. DEEPFEED: But have you really had acquaintance at first hand with these horrors that one hears of as of far off unhappy things, alas, not long ago? Have you actually had personal experience?

MR. LONGPAST: Oh yes; and I assure you that you wouldn't believe what goes on unless you tasted the

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products with your own palate. A couple of months ago I went to talk to a women's teachers' training college—enormous place, teeming with young women, three hundred odd embryo teachers and some forty or fifty on the staff. I had dinner there, and as I was the visiting speaker—the great man for the occasion, you understand—I suppose they put their best foot forward to feed me. Well, would you believe it, not a single item of that dinner had been cooked? First, tomato soup out of a tin, then for the main course, cold March night as it was, some cold tinned salmon coupled with beetroot and Russian salad—a most repulsive dish. Then came one of the innumerable products of the new Ice Age, tinned pears, I think, with a blob of ice-cream—no it wasn't, it was tinned apricots and a blob of ice-cream—some English coffee and we were done. God, what a meal. Now what do you say to that—three hundred and fifty odd young women in the place and not a single thing cooked.

MR. DEEPFEED: Didn't know how to cook, I suppose.

MR. LONGPAST: Probably not, but even if they did, not allowed to do it.

MR. DEEPFEED: What were they doing?

MR. LONGPAST: Oh, going to lectures on *The Tendencies of the Modern Novel* or on *Child Psychology*—I went to hear one of them next morning.

MR. DEEPFEED: What a preparation for marriage, a comfortably run house and keeping hubby happy! Poor brute, if he wanted anything eatable, I suppose he would have to learn to cook it himself. Never was

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there an age in which men permitted themselves be so ill done by. What a poor lot we are. Why, even the Victorians . . . !

MR. LONGPAST: Then there is another thing I found out there.

MR. DEEPFEED: Some new horror?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, it struck me as pretty shocking. A young woman from a "posh" girls' school talked to me about her education. The top part of the school, she said, was divided into three grades according to intelligence. In the top grade they did chemistry, physics or biology or what were called "cultural" subjects such as history and literature—*Tendencies of the Modern Novel* again, or *Influence of the Graveyard School on the Romantics*, or something of that kind, I suppose—or what you will; in the middle grade they had the choice between science proper and "cultural" subjects on the one hand or household management and domestic science—I think it was called that—the other; in the bottom grade, where presumably were the fools, you had no choice but did household management and domestic science. My informant was intelligent and, therefore, hadn't learned a single thing which could conceivably be of any use to her; she knew no recipes, couldn't cook, had never made a conservé, never potted meat, never grown vegetables, never kept stock for soup. She knew absolutely nothing.

MR. DEEPFEED: He is a fool who marries but a greater who doesn't marry a fool.

MR. LONGPAST: Who said that?

MR. DEEPFEED: I did.

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MR. LONGPAST: I don't mean that. I meant who said it first.

MR. DEEPFEED: Congreve or Wycherley or one of those chaps. Your story invests the remark with a horrid contemporary significance.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, you see how it is. Only the fools have the chance to learn how to make a comfortable home and a happy man which, I take it, is why to-day we so rarely see that contented smile on the face of the satisfied male.

MR. DEEPFEED: It's also why we are all so irritable; we never get a decent meal but only horrible rushed little snacks, stealing the time which ought to have gone to a decently leisured meal in order to keep an appointment with the psycho-analyst, whom we proceed to pay handsomely for *not* curing us of the evil effects of improper living.

MR. LONGPAST: All of which happens because our women are too busy getting culture and learning about "the tendencies of the modern novel" to have time to learn anything useful, by which, of course, I mean useful to us.

MR. DEEPFEED: All of which happens, as you say, because our women are busy getting culture.

MR. LONGPAST: Hence blancmange, lovely blancmange—cornflour out of the package with colouring added to taste. Come to Britain for Britain's beautiful blancmange! Oh, that I were a poet, that I could properly hymn its glories in a roundel.

MR. DEEPFEED: You can't—at least not a rhyming one because nothing rhymes with blancmange.

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MR. LONGPAST: No, I suppose it doesn't in English; but the word, after all, is French, so that if one were allowed to use another French word to rhyme with it something might be done.

He meditated a moment. "What about this," he said,

*"Beautiful British blancmange
So tasteless, so dank and so cold,
Unworthy the Gallic mensonge
That refers to it merely as mould!"*

MR. DEEPFEED: Fine, very fine.

MR. LONGPAST: Glad you like it. Come on now, it's your turn.

MR. DEEPFEED (meditates): All right, what about this?

*" Beautiful British blancmange
So simple and healthy its use,
The practical people of Penge
Disdain the more sensual mousse."*

MR. LONGPAST: Very fine! But tell me, Penge, Penge—what is that? Not a French word at all but a very English suburb.

MR. DEEPFEED: Ah, yes, but pronounced in the French manner.

MR. LONGPAST: Conceded. So much for blancmange. After blancmange what?

MR. DEEPFEED: Well, still deriving from our women getting culture, hence prunes and custard.

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MR. LONGPAST: Ah, the sanitary prune, the incomparable custard.

MR. DEEFEEED: Hence those quivering, sensitive allies.

MR. LONGPAST: Straight out of the carton. Warm water—ten minutes. Hence boiled fish served with parsley sauce, or what they call “white sauce”, and with tinned peas or cabbage.

MR. DEEFEEED: Is there any other people in the world who would have thought of a more loathsome combination—boiled cod and tinned peas? I was once present at a Paris restaurant where a young Englishman asked for it and the waiter nearly fell over backwards.

MR. LONGPAST: Except, please remember, that it never is cod. Hake, plaice, skate, halibut, even turbot, but never cod. Oh no, not cod.

MR. DEEFEEED: Hence rice pudding, those amorphous sticky lumps of congealed rice, soggy with water.

MR. LONGPAST: To think that there are Indians who insist on dying because they can't get it.

MR. DEEFEEED: Not *that* because, after all, they don't get *that*. Their handful of rice may be meagre but it is at least dry.

MR. LONGPAST: Let us speak now of that sweet variety of English puddings, letting our minds dwell long and lovingly upon them. Shall I begin?

MR. DEEFEEED: On the contrary I propose to begin, literatively as befits the dignity of the subject, with cabinet and Cumberland.

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MR. LONGPAST: I cap you with Duchess and Devonshire and, may I add, Queen's.

MR. DEEPFEED: I give you College and Bakewell and Messina.

MR. LONGPAST: I say, have you any idea what any of them are?

MR. DEEPFEED: Of the characteristics that distinguish pudding from pudding—Queen's from Messina, Cumberland from Duchess and so on? Not the faintest.

MR. LONGPAST: I have always supposed that bread and flour constituted the uniform base of all of them.

MR. DEEPFEED: No, I have a more plausible suggestion. There is a kind of comestible known as a Swiss roll, a sort of yellow stuff, wrapped round itself in rolls and tacked together with layers of jam. Now what I believe our women do is to go out and buy some of this stuff, cover it with the usual counterpane of custard or white sauce and then serve it as one of these puddings.

MR. LONGPAST: And do you really believe this?

MR. DEEPFEED: Well, I know they buy it to make the foundation of their soggy trifles, pouring over it little ready-made fruit juice. And the custard, the white sauce, are, it must be remembered, wonderful disguisers.

MR. LONGPAST: Beneficent custard, admirable white sauce. With what unfailing regularity they throw the merciful mantle of their viscous natures over the products of our kitchens, concealing their defects from the prying eyes of the impertinent and the curious!

MR. DEEPFEED: Noble inventions indeed! B

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speaking of jam, what has become of the jam roll that there used to be at school—the pudding that was called “roly-poly” made of rich, fat suet, saturated with fruit jam, home-made jam, mark you, even for a pudding—which oozed gloriously out at the gentlest touch, with just that faint hint of burning to give it bite.

MR. LONGPAST: It has, I fear, gone the way of all home-made puddings. I encountered a contemporary jam roll the other day at a school where I was visiting a nephew. There was a hard outer casing—not the soft, fat, oozy suet we used to know—folded round and round like a roll of linoleum, and in the curves between the folds the hint—the *soupçon* of a *nuance*, no more—of a little, a very little jam. When you squeezed or broke the thing up, this jam peeped coyly out.

MR. DEEFEEED: Of what sort was it?

MR. LONGPAST: Couldn't say. The thing had no distinctive taste of any kind which means, I take it, that it was synthetic—bits of all sorts with a foundation of glucose and a deep infusion of turnip.

MR. DEEFEEED: I don't believe that it is possible to buy straight jam now.

MR. LONGPAST: You're right there. It is possible to buy named jams such as raspberry or strawberry, but the name is for the most part an empty sound. A dozen or so pips, perhaps, indicate some origin of raspberry, a little viscous lump may stand for strawberry, but the rest is turnip, glucose, and colouring matter or whatever it may be. As a matter of interest

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I once had a student who worked in a firm who made artificial wooden pips to put into "raspberry" jam.

MR. DEEPFEED: How wonderful are the resources of civilisation, how breath-taking the wonders of science. By preserving and mixing and blending and freezing and mass-producing, they have enabled us to take all the taste out of jam.

MR. LONGPAST: Or out of cream. We whip it, puff it, preserve it, freeze it, do God knows what to it, to show how clever we are, but we never serve it as just cream.

MR. DEEPFEED: Shall I tell you a story about cream?

MR. LONGPAST: Yes, if it is horrible. My spleen won't stand anything at the moment but horrors.

MR. DEEPFEED: Have some sherry now.

MR. LONGPAST: No, I will wait for the proper moment. I don't want my sherry spoiled or my horrors—you assure me there is horror? [Mr. Deepfeed reassured him]—blunted.

MR. DEEPFEED: Well, you must know that in the early spring of '39 I was staying at a farmhouse in the West Country. It was a dairy farm and there was a large herd of Guernseys. But did we have fresh cream with our tinned apricots? Not a bit of it. The cream which was served to us came out of tins or bottles; it was labelled and was called "Preserved". When I asked the farmer's wife why this was, she said that it wasn't worth her time and trouble to put some of the milk aside from the general supply and then separate it for cream. One day when she was bringing

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the tinned pears with the usual tin of preserved cream she gave vent to an exclamation. "Well, I never!" she said. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Well," she said, "I do believe that's our own cream come back to us. You see," she explained, "we have been sending off our milk to a new factory which has only just been opened and I know for a fact that it is only taking its milk at the moment from our farm and one other. I suppose, as likely as not, our milk's gone all the way into Bristol, been turned into preserved cream and sold wholesale to the grocers who have sold it retail to me so that I might bring it back to the farm. Well, I never!"

MR. LONGPAST: An agreeable story. I congratulate you. But have you ever been on the Great West Road early in the morning?

MR. DEEFEE: Can't remember. Why do you ask?

MR. LONGPAST: Because there you will see a string of lorries from Covent Garden laden with vegetables making their way towards Reading, Newbury, Swindon, Wantage, Farringdon and such-like places.

MR. DEEFEE: Well, why not? What is there remarkable about that?

MR. LONGPAST: Merely that the lorries are inscribed with the names of Reading, Newbury and Swindon farms which means, I suppose, that these lorries have lately taken vegetables from these very same farms in Covent Garden; they may be—I dare say in some cases they are—the identical cauliflowers that are now being brought back again to the towns from which they started earlier in the morning.

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MR. DEEPFEED: Are you sure of that? I find it a bit hard to believe even of this age.

MR. LONGPAST: Yes, because I once travelled in one of the lorries. I was hitch-hiking—not bad at my age—and the driver told me about it. He said what a funny thing it was that the growers of Newbury had to send all their fruit and vegetables to London in order that they might be brought back to be sold in Newbury.

MR. DEEPFEED: Very funny, but no funnier than my sitting in the dining-room of a Cornish hotel with windows that looked over the harbour and watching them landing pilchards by the thousand while I was eating stinking fish that had come all the way from Grimsby.

MR. LONGPAST: How great are the wonders of modern transport. Because we can transport food from longer distances and preserve it for longer periods than people have ever done before, we take it for granted that we *must* do these things, irrespective of whether they make the food taste better; or rather in spite of the fact that they always make it taste worse and sometimes prevent it from tasting at all.

MR. DEEPFEED: But the food absurdity is only special case of a more general absurdity. Science has enabled human beings to do all sorts of things that they could never do before. To move faster, to produce more, to fly in the air, to travel under the water, to kill one another in greater numbers, from higher altitudes, from greater distances, in shorter time. The scientists having won the knowledge which gave u

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these powers, we immediately proceed to apply it without stopping to think whether the application makes us wiser or better or even happier. In fact, it usually does the reverse.

MR. LONGPAST: Don't be too hard on us. When did mankind ever behave differently? I believe there is only one recorded case of human beings having made a new invention or acquired a new power, deliberately denying themselves its use.

MR. DEEPFEED: Who were these enlightened persons?

MR. LONGPAST: The Chinese of the fourth century A.D. who, having discovered gunpowder, restricted its use by governmental decree to the manufacture of squibs and crackers. But a truce to pontifications about the age. Let's get back to British food.

MR. DEEPFEED (proceeding to shell some garden peas): Shall we now proceed to hymn the joys of English vegetables?

MR. DEEPFEED: Haven't we had nearly enough? Besides, I'm getting hungry.

MR. LONGPAST: Would you, then, have me pass by the universal potato, servable, if my memory may be relied upon, in twenty-three or is it twenty-four different guises, but served to us only under five, the boiled, the mashed, the roast, the "chip" or the baked in their jackets. Oh, those baked potatoes served to you with your beetroot supper and a tin of special brawn by your smiling hostess!

MR. DEEPFEED: "So nice, I always say, properly baked in their jackets. They retain their natural, earthy

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flavour that way, don't you think? Be sure to put some butter on them"—that's how it goes, doesn't it?

MR. LONGPAST: "Thanks, I will. Delicious, yes, delicious." But are we not to speak of the beetroot itself, so bright and bloody, bloody with the purple of the veins rather than with the scarlet of the arteries, endowed with what is mercifully so unique a smell?

MR. DEEPFEED: No, let's give it a miss, and the turnips and the parsnips and the carrots and the Jerusalem artichokes.

MR. LONGPAST: Oh, do you think so? The young carrot can be very toothsome properly cooked, you know.

MR. DEEPFEED: But when in modern England is it properly cooked, in butter, very young, with a touch of garlic? Nonsense, and you know that it's nonsense! But are we to say nothing of greens? Green English cabbage, yellow English sprouts, broccoli and turnip tops all dripping with the delicious water in which they have been boiled. Oh, let us not forget them, albeit they aren't horrors of the new time, they go back into an ancestral antiquity. *They* are the backbone of the English kitchen. They have made England what it is. Oh, let us not forget *them*.

MR. LONGPAST: We never, never could.

MR. DEEPFEED: But coming specifically to the distinctive horrors of the *new* time. How would you name them?

MR. LONGPAST: Difficult to answer. There are so many. Some perhaps would specify the contemporary sausage. Ah, when one thinks of some of the glorious

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sausages of the past—Alden's Oxford sausages, for example, when I was a schoolboy at the Dragon School in the early years of the century. How freshly they stand out in my memory, so rich, so spicy, so cunningly blended of chopped herbs and pork! There was a man at Amberley in Sussex who used to drive me mad when I was trying to write in the garden with the erupting and eructating of an unsilenced, stationary petrol motor. One day I discovered that the motor worked a sausage machine. Having suffered so much and for so long from the motor, I resolved to try the sausages it produced. At the first taste all was forgiven and forgotten, so fresh they were and tasty with, I remember particularly, a peculiar thymy flavour that ravished the palate. When I remember some of the great sausages of the past—Stamford, where three of the East Midland counties meet, *was* a wonderful place for sausages, pies, brawns, and acclets—I can pronounce the word, but I'm blessed if I can spell it.

MR. DEEPFEED: What is it, anyway?

MR. LONGPAST: Acelet originates in Lincolnshire and belongs to the brawn species but is a super brawn with a foundation of kidney and liver and a cunning infusion of herbs and spices. . . .

MR. DEEPFEED: By the way, have you ever reflected on the mystery of the contemporary kidney?

MR. LONGPAST: You mean where they go?

MR. DEEPFEED: Yes. If an animal has a liver, you would think it would have a kidney, but ever since the war there has been only one pair of kidneys for twenty livers. And it isn't as if they all went into

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hotels. After all, one has sometimes had to feed in hotels and they are as kidneyless as the private house.

MR. LONGPAST: I have always supposed that they went under the counters and stayed there—stayed there, that is to say, for the regaling of the butcher and his friends. You know, people like butchers and poulterers often know quite a lot about food and make a point of getting the tit-bits to which their privileged position entitles them. However, to return to the sausage. . . .

MR. DEEPFEED: Sorry I interrupted.

MR. LONGPAST: Not at all. Most interesting!

MR. DEEPFEED: But since I *have* digressed into kidneys, let me add that sweetbreads are in a similar case. The loss wouldn't matter so much, if it weren't for that deliciously distinctive taste of the good kidney, whether sheep or ox, with its delicate suggestion, a *soupçon*, no more, of urine. But you want to get back to the sausage. . . .

MR. LONGPAST: When I say that I remember some of the great sausages of past times and places—for the sausage is, or should be, an essentially local product, made, as it might be, across the road so that it has no time to get stale waiting and travelling—those leathery bags of tasteless miscellany—much of it sawdust, I believe—which lie to-day on the plate looking for all the world like the black turds that they so unappetisingly resemble, seem to me an outrage against God and man.

MR. LONGPAST: Agreed! But do you know the variety that has a skin which is not so much leather

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as elastic, so that under the impact of the teeth it flies apart with a ping with such violence that in extreme cases the two flying ends tweak the lips and the gums?

MR. DEEPFEED (gloomily): I do. But what of the contents? Do you, for example, know anything that achieves more completely the condition of total tastelessness, in so far, of course, as such a condition is compatible with unpleasingness, as the contemporary sausage?

MR. LONGPAST (musingly): Degrees of tastelessness! An interesting concept! Do I know, you ask, of a degree which is more extreme? I think I do. What about slices of meat loaf which simply doesn't taste at all?

MR. DEEPFEED: That precisely is the expression I used of the contemporary sausage and you agreed. No, there can't be degrees of no taste at all; there can't, as a philosopher you will agree, be degrees of nothingness.

MR. LONGPAST: All right, all right. I suppose I was unconsciously invoking another criterion. For meat loaf belongs, after all, to the same food category as the *pâté*. Now when one thinks of it in relation to *pâtés* one has had—in Alsace for example . . .

MR. DEEPFEED (impatiently): I know, I know, but then the Alsace *pâté* is of the same general type as, let us say, the sausages you get at Strasbourg. Besides, you yourself have already spoken of Alden's Oxford sausages of fifty years ago, and of the Amberley sausage of not more than twenty. Moreover, I have a notion that all this talk of sausages is a little off the point.

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MR. LONGPAST: Why so?

MR. DEEFEEED: Because, you see, it might be alleged with some show of plausibility that, when meat is so short that there isn't enough to go round, you can't expect made-up foods to be other than anaemic, so that, though all we have said is true, it might be retorted that there is no help for it. Thus, though they are horrors wholly distinctive of our age, the sausage and the meat loaf are, nevertheless, it might be said, not wholly reprehensible horrors. Now when you asked me to name some of the special horrors of our time, I take it you had in mind morally reprehensible horrors, morally reprehensible in the sense that they need not be at all.

MR. LONGPAST: But are due to the inexcusable ignorance, casualness, carelessness, laziness, slovenliness and insensibility of English women who, as we know, will eat anything.

MR. DEEFEEED: Or nothing.

MR. LONGPAST: Or, as you say, to all intents and purposes nothing. Anyway, they don't mind what they eat, thereby distinguishing their approach to the gastronomic from their approach to the visual arts.

MR. DEEFEEED: Aren't you being a little portentous?

MR. LONGPAST: All I wanted to say was that whereas in the picture gallery their characteristic cry is "I don't know anything about art, but I do know what I like", in the kitchen it is "I don't know anything about cooking, and I don't want to, and I don't mind what I eat". But returning to what you call "morally

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apprehensible horrors", I think that, for my part, I should plump for the mixture known as Russian salad—you know, those little chopped-up bits of carrot and turnip, interspersed with sickly-looking peas, together with the innumerable products of the New Ice Age—no English sweet complete without 'em—as the most instinctive because the most universal.

MR. DEEPFEED (meditatively): I don't understand what has happened about ices. When I was a boy, there were ices but they were comparatively rare and they were divided into two kinds, "cream" and "water". There was also a thing called a Neapolitan ice, a slab with coloured stripes like a rainbow. Cream ices were delicious; I used to choose one for my birthday treat. Water ices were comparatively poor stuff. Now the New Ice Age supplies in vast quantities a substance which is neither cream nor water but intermediate between the two, creamier than the water ice, more watery than the cream ice; and what is interesting is the inundation of the whole country by a flood of this ice as the universal sweet. How has it come about?

MR. LONGPAST: Don't know. The contemporary ice-cream comes, I have always supposed, out of America, and has something to do, I dare say, with the invention of the "frig". No harm in it at all, if it weren't used to the exclusion of all other sweets.

MR. DEEPFEED: Oh, but you forget one very distinctive horror.

MR. LONGPAST: What's that?

MR. DEEPFEED: The contemporary tart—not pie, tart. The pie, when filled with ~~freshly cooked~~ fresh

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fruit, coyly hidden under flaky pastry made with plenty of lard, propped up on an egg-cup in the middle, and served with plenty of cream and sugar, could be a noble dish. Just think, for example, of a properly made raspberry and redcurrant pie, such as we are having to-day. Or think of a good plum pie, the juice of which could on occasion rise almost to the level of the taste of wine. Now contrast the contemporary tart. Its distinctive feature is the separate preparation of the ingredients, the fruit straight from its tin, and the oblong strips of pastry bought, presumably ready-made, at the baker's. These introduced to each other for the first time on the eater's plate and the whole served under a counterpane of the inevitable custard form a dish eminently suitable for a mid-twentieth century British sweet.

MR. LONGPAST: I say, aren't you getting hungry?

MR. DEEPFEED: Yes, I ought not to have mentioned that redcurrant pie. Let's get on with it.

All the time Mr. Longpast and Mr. Deepfeed had been talking, they had been busying themselves under Mr. Deepfeed's direction, over the preparation of their luncheon. Their conversation on British food had neither delayed nor had it sickened them. On the contrary, it had given an edge to appetite by way of contrast to what they knew to be in store for them, as the Romans used to employ an emetic to clear the stomach of impurities before eating. In just the same way the memories of the productions of the British cooks under whom they had suffered served to provide an emetic of the spirit.

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You would, no doubt, dear reader, like to know what they had. As theirs was, with two exceptions, a purely English meal, you shall be told, since it is just possible you may be incited to go and do likewise. Know, then—and this was the first exception—that they began with a *pâté* which Mr. Deepfeed had himself prepared from kidneys, liver, pork and herbs according to a recipe which he had learned when staying as a youth in Perigord. This was followed by an omelette *fines herbes*. There followed as main dish a small saddle of mutton taken by what means we shall not enquire from one of Mr. Longpast's own sheep which had recently died. The old gentlemen were particularly enthusiastic over this saddle, a joint practically unknown to them since the War. With it they had new potatoes and peas. There had been a controversy between them on the vexed question of redcurrant jelly or mint sauce, or both or neither. In favour of redcurrant jelly Mr. Longpast had cited tradition, never to be despised in matters of food. In favour of mint sauce Mr. Deepfeed had adduced the season. It was June, the mint was new, and a new flask of good malt vinegar was available. Mint sauce was perfect with new potatoes and though they had agreed that the animal they were eating was entitled to rank as mutton rather than lamb, yet the meat was at once so juicy and so tender as to justify a lamb-like trimming.

In favour of neither was the marked antipathy of both to claret. In view of the worth of Mr. Longpast's claret, of which more in a moment, they decided on neither. There followed raspberry and redcurrant pie

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with pastry made by Mr. Deepfeed's own loving hand and cream from the one Jersey cow which was kept for the purpose of providing the house. They finished with a piece of Brie specially chosen by Mr. Deepfeed at Fortnum's—he had spent half an hour on the choice—and brought down by hand two days before.

For wine Mr. Longpast had provided the following: with the *pâté* a bottle of Montrachet 1945 which was finished with the omelette; with the saddle a bottle of Chateau Beycheville 1938 which both praised; with the Brie half a bottle of old Burgundy (Musigny 1929). When the feast was over, the two old men, with the contented smiles of satisfied males on their faces, cleared away and retired to their beds for a well-earned nap. The women, they thought, could wash up when they returned in the evening and prepared their bacon and eggs.

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The harvest was over and Mr. Longpast was preparing for his annual visit to the North. This usually took place in the autumn when Mr. Longpast, who in his youth had been an assiduous walker on mountain and moorland, felt a longing for grander scenes and wider horizons than were afforded by the wooden downlands of the Hampshire-Sussex border. And so year after year, late September had seen him in the Scottish lowlands, the northern Pennines or the Lake District. Of these he greatly preferred the Lakes, but one or two unfortunate experiences in well-loved spots—where he had been gramophones and beach pyjamas by the lake in Borrowdale and motor-bicycles eructating lustily over the steepes of Hardknott—had of recent years sent him elsewhere, bitterly complaining that he and his contemporaries, the first generation of townsmen to discover the beauty of these places, hadn't had the sense to keep quiet about their discovery, with the result that wild scenery was now the fashion; all of which, he said, only showed the danger of conducting propaganda on behalf of the good, the beautiful and the true among a quarter-educated proletariat.

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"Why," he exclaimed, "couldn't we keep our si mouths shut? All the beautiful places having been lo ago invaded and polluted, we shall be driven in t end to repair for wildness and solitude to Bedfordsh in February. Well, I have learned my lesson. W horses won't drag out of me praise of Beds. in Fel

More recently still, however, Mr. Longpast had co upon a district of the Lakes which was comparatively unvisited. For obvious reasons it is not possible say precisely where this district was, but this much least may be conceded by way of elimination—it w not that great unknown area lying north of Skidd where is Great Calva, nor the equally large and t visited area lying north-west of Westwater, wh Copeland Forest leads on into the Kinniside hills a a man may walk all day in August from Lank Ri without seeing persons or habitations until he com to the little peak of Grike and looks down upon Enn dale and the Anglers; nor was it one of those love southern valleys, the Rusland Valley, for instance, th run up into the Lakeland foothills between Conist and Windermere. But there is country lying betwe Coniston and Dunnerdale where the hill of Caw loo out over the Lickle and Apple Tree Worth Becks whi —but if more were said, too much might be known.

Here Mr. Longpast was staying, though it cannot told where he stayed, with his niece Nellie, her scho friend Norah Form and Michael. Michael, who li so many students, knew the Lakes well by ma book and compass and had led parties by time-ta along scheduled routes, was a little shocked by M

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Longpast's casual approach to the "tops", and was apt to remonstrate with him about his failure to provide himself with hot drinks, brandy, change of clothing and the rest of the modern mountaineer's paraphernalia, wherewith lives are saved in emergencies on mountains when limbs are sprained or ways lost in the mist.

In these remonstrances Michael was much abetted by Norah Form, a precise little woman who inspected under the National Health Act—or was she perhaps a almoner or a probation officer?—and was already making hard for permanent spinsterdom unless she could be headed off at this comparatively late hour—late not chronologically, for she was not more than twenty-seven, but psychologically, for she was already nine-tenths official. For several days they had contented themselves with scrambles over the hills near the farmhouse until Mr. Longpast was seized with the desire to revisit the more frequented part of the Lakes, where he had served his climbing apprenticeship as a young man.

For many years he had been in the habit of attending man-hunt held annually at Whitsun. Some twenty-old men had been gathered at Seatoller House for three or four days. Each morning three of them, the hares, would make their way with red scarves pinned to their shoulders, on to a prescribed mountain area containing many of the central peaks of the Lakes. An hour later, the rest, the hounds, would start. The game was simple—the hares had to remain uncaught, if they could, until five o'clock—but it involved much

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stalking and running and headlong chases down precipices from whose terrifying aspect the hunters in other circumstances would have shrunk back in blanched affright. The game afforded ample opportunities for those who felt in need of "soliquots" (quotas of solitude) to recover from the strains of London life, since a hound, if he felt so disposed, could wander alone and unseen all day, easily avoiding the chases to which, as the day wore on, the hares were increasingly subjected, for it was held to be the duty of a hare to give good sport rather than to remain uncaught. Mr. Longpast who, for sentimental reasons, had continued to attend these gatherings for some years after his powers as a runner had declined, had been in his later years particularly addicted to "soliquots", alleging that a day's solitude in grand scenery followed by a hearty social evening passed with a score of beer-drinking, chorus-singing men, wedged together in a little parlour at the back of Seatoller House, was a way of passing the time as near perfection as man was entitled to wish for in this life.

It was sentiment, then, that now led him to revisit a part of the Lakes from which he had been expelled by the invasions of the vulgar scattering their cigarette ends, cartons and waste paper on Great Gable, not to speak of that exhausted air, as of a woman who has enjoyed the embraces of too many lovers which, as he insisted, now clung about the Honister, diffusing itself over Grey Knotts, Brandreth and Green Gable to merge into the greater exhaustion of Great Gable itself.

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On the present occasion he decided to avoid this over-frequented area and to ascend the Pillar-Steeple ridge which, though less affected than Haystacks and the Gables by the Hunt, had nevertheless fallen within its boundaries.

Starting early, the party drove over the Honister into Buttermere, and proceeded by Black Sail Pass over Looking Stead on to Pillar. They had just left Pillar for Steeple when the mist came down. Mr. Longpast's mountaineering days had been many, but they had also been long ago. Besides, he had never liked mist which depressed him and made him feel nervous. His instinct was always to get down out of it at the earliest possible moment by the quickest possible route. Yielding to this instinct on the present occasion, he made off in a northerly direction where, as he believed, a quick and easy descent led off Haycock into Deep Ghyll. But there must have been miscalculation—all too easy in the mist—as to times, distances and exact locations for, instead of coming to the verge of an easy descent, moving visibly down below the mist, the party found itself at the edge of what looked uncomfortably like a precipice. An almost vertical descent, broken only by the shapes of beetling rocks showing black and shiny in the mist which whirled up to their feet, was a sight from which all brank back in apprehension. Mr. Longpast in particular rushed back so precipitately up the slope that he missed his footing on the slippery surface of a wet slab and came down heavily with one leg twisted under him. Mr. Longpast bellowed with pain and when, after a

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few moments, the others assisted him to rise, he found himself quite unable to bear his weight upon the affected limb and incapable, therefore, of walking. Diagnosing a bad sprain or a wrenching of the ligament of the ankle, the party set itself to consider what should be done.

Their plight was not enviable. They didn't know where they were and didn't know, therefore, in which direction to proceed in order to get down out of the mist. The mist itself, which had begun with drizzle, had turned to rain which, blown by a stiff breeze, bade fair to break through the defences of mackintosh and oilskin and to wet the warm, sensitive bodies which lay wrapped beneath.

Mr. Longpast could only move with the greatest difficulty and pain and, to make matters worse, it was getting late and within two or three hours at most would be dark. A hurried council of war led to a decision to send Michael and Norah for help. They were to get off the mountain in whatever direction they could find a practicable descent, whether into Ennerdale or Wastdale or over Caw Fell which, they judged could not be far away, down the run of Bleney while Nellie was to stay with her uncle. It was at this juncture that the sound of whistling reached them. It was a merry, light-hearted whistle and was rendering a tune which, to Mr. Longpast's delighted surprise, revealed itself as that of the second Papageno song from *The Magic Flute*. They shouted and the whistling drew nearer until presently the figure of a young man loomed through the mist.

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His clothing, by the standard of contemporary fashions prescribed for climbers and rambles on mountains, was grossly defective. He was bare-headed and over an open-necked shirt wore a thick woollen sweater, just the thing to collect and harbour the moisture. Shorts and a pair of thick woollen stockings, the sort that young men wear for playing rugger, added, not in the regulation boots, but in a pair of stout brown shoes. Glancing at them, Norah found herself wondering almost instinctively, if they were killed; and, if not, what were the chances of his breaking an ankle. The wearer of this grossly unsuitable attire was himself an agreeable spectacle. He was tall and strongly built though slim, with square shoulders, narrow thighs and beautifully shaped legs, swelling knees and slender ankles. His head was covered with coal-black mop of wavy hair which curled over the forehead. The chin was firm, the nose very slightly turned up, the eyes deep blue and very bright, though at the moment expressive of concern.

THE STRANGER (looking at Mr. Longpast): You seem to be in trouble. Can I help?

Michael explained the situation. Their intention, he said, had been to return to Buttermere where was their car, but they had lost their way in the mist and now their only concern was to get Mr. Longpast out of the mist and off the mountain as soon as might be to whichever of the valleys was the nearest and the most accessible. "Unfortunately," said the stranger, they aren't the same thing. The most accessible valley reachable by the easiest route is Ennerdale; the nearest

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is Highdale"—the reader will excuse the fictitious name—"where my cottage is. But it's a steep way down. What," he asked, turning to Nellie, "would be the best for the gentleman?" "My uncle," said Nellie, "let me introduce us." When this had been done and they had found out that the stranger's name was Arthur Logan, the party further consulted as to the best course to adopt. They finally decided on the shortest descent into Highdale, the comparatively brief period of daylight remaining being an important factor in the decision.

Supported by Michael and Logan, Mr. Longpast got with difficulty on to his feet and, gingerly putting the wounded foot to the ground, found that it would just though painfully, bear his weight provided that he leant heavily on the shoulders of the other two men.

Very slowly they made their way along the ridge until presently Logan took a sharp turn to the right almost immediately after which they began to descend. With activity, the movement of Mr. Longpast's foot grew a little easier, though still very painful, especially when the steepness of the slope involved scrambling and the use of hands and arms to get a hold on the wet slope and crumbly rocks. Such places, however, grew fewer and it was just getting dark when the mist parted and revealed a view of a green valley enclosed as it seemed, on all sides by hills.

"How far from the bottom of the descent to the nearest house?" asked Nellie. "The nearest house my cottage," replied Logan, "and the distance

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between two and three miles; but there is a road or, rather, a track which begins about half a mile from the bottom and I can go on ahead and bring the car to the end of the track."

When at last they got off the mountain, Mr. Logan went on ahead while the others waited with Mr. Longpast. A couple of hours later, it being now quite dark, Mr. Longpast was settled in an armchair, holding out his hands to the fire in the stranger's cottage; Logan's friend James was, with Nellie's help, busying himself over the preparations for supper, and Michael and Norah were taking the opportunity to have a good hot wash—there was no bathroom. Mr. Longpast at last had leisure to take stock of his rescuer and host who sat opposite him on the other side of the fire.

MR. LONGPAST: Are you having a long holiday here?

LOGAN: Holiday? Why, I live here.

MR. LONGPAST (surprised): What, all the year round?

LOGAN: Yes, this is my home.

MR. LONGPAST: What on earth do you do with yourself all the time?

LOGAN: Not much. I read a lot, write a bit, do a certain amount of painting and spend a lot of time in the hills; but mostly I suppose I am engaged in that you might call escaping from civilisation.

MR. LONGPAST (intrigued): Please explain.

LOGAN: Well, you see, I was brought up in the country and my people are or were fairly well to do. It was intended that I should take to the Law with a few later to entering politics. So, after going down

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from Oxford, I was admitted to the Middle Temple and started to eat dinners and take exams.

MR. LONGPAST: Pretty bad dinners too, I should judge from all accounts.

LOGAN: Yes, while the exams are as stiff as ever the food has got softer and softer. Meanwhile, I lived in digs in Chelsea with James. As time went on, I grew to hate London more and more. London life seemed to me to get nastier, uglier, noisier, vulgare and cheaper in everything but in actual monetary cost, month by month. I grew, too, increasingly resentful of the interferences and deprivations of the State.

MR. LONGPAST: It would interest me to know why. Surely the State, by means of what you call its interferences, has raised the level of the poor, removed the fear of want from thousands of people and made for fair shares all round.

LOGAN: Maybe. But all these are altruistic considerations; you are thinking in terms of others, while I am trying only to answer Mr. Longpast's question and say how the Welfare State affected me.

MR. LONGPAST: And how did it?

LOGAN: As I've just said it affected me chiefly by its interferences and deprivations.

MR. LONGPAST: What interferences do you complain of?

LOGAN: All of them, my dear sir, all of them. When having given up the Law, I took a job, which I presently did, with a publisher, the State took part of my salary away from me for insurance, another consider-

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able slice of it went in income tax, and yet another was deducted for my pension.

NORAH (who had just come in fresh and rosy from her wash with the spare garments which she always carried so providently in her rucksack dry upon her): That money for insurance and for pension was taken in order that you might have free medical treatment when you are ill, maintenance at the State's expense when you are out of a job and maintenance, again at the State's expense, when you grow too old to work. You can't call these interferences, still less deprivations.

LOGAN: Why not? The interferences were certain and compulsory. There seemed to be no way of escaping them, while the so-called benefits were problematical and contingent.

MR. LONGPAST: Why? Didn't you get your benefits?

LOGAN: No, I didn't. For one thing I was never ill—nobody, after all, has any right to be ill between the ages of fourteen and fifty—and for another, I had a little money of my own and when in due course I gave up the publisher's business because I wanted to write myself, I was told that I couldn't draw unemployment insurance benefit, unless I showed myself willing to take some other job which the Employment Exchange was quite prepared to offer me.

NORAH: Well, didn't they offer you another job?

LOGAN: Yes, they did, several; a temporary clerkship in a Government office, a job in Lloyds, and another in a publisher's office preparing indexes for authors who were too lazy to prepare them for themselves. One job, I remember, was counting football

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pool coupons. Another meant going to Birmingham. Just think of that, I ask you, going to live in Birmingham!

MR. LONGPAST: I agree, though I am old enough to believe that when you are young you must expect to "go through it" a bit. I know I did, with twenty years' drudgery in a Government office to my credit.

LOGAN: Oh, you think *that*, do you? The eternal old man's attitude! I had to go through it and look at me now; I'm none the worse for it; there is nothing the matter with *me*, so why shouldn't you go through it too?

MR. LONGPAST: You are quite right. It is a disgraceful thing to have said, and I am glad to withdraw the remark. Thank you for pulling me up.

NORAH: But, Mr. Logan, you also mentioned deprivations. What were they?

LOGAN: Well, they were partly food deprivations. I couldn't buy this and I couldn't buy that. For example, I like eating French cheeses. Well, you know, the Government stopped importing them. I like meat and plenty of it. The Government prevented me from buying more than a miserable mouthful a week.

NORAH: That was so that others might have their share of the very limited supply, which was all the country's economic position permitted.

LOGAN: No doubt, no doubt, but, once again, I am only answering the question, which was "What was the Government depriving you of?" and not "Do you wish to be an altruist?" That was a question I was

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never asked; altruism was thrust upon me. But there were more subtle deprivations.

MR. LONGPAST: For example?

LOGAN: Well, cast your mind back to the 'twenties. A young man of my kind living in London, especially if, as I did, he probably lived in Chelsea, really had a good time. There were parties and bottle parties.

NELLIE: What were those?

LOGAN: Every guest brought his own bottle of wine or spirits with him; the drink was pooled and everybody drank as much as they wanted and could get hold of. Then there were shadowgraph parties.

NELLIE (intrigued): What were they? Please explain.

LOGAN: You seem to be very ignorant of the pre-history of your own times. Where, I wonder, were you raised?

NELLIE: Mostly in London and Oxford.

LOGAN: The Latin Quarter of Cowley! But have you never *read* anything about the 'twenties?

NELLIE: Yes, but I don't know what a shadowgraph party was.

MR. LONGPAST: I can enlighten you there, Nellie. I can remember them well.

NELLIE: Uncle, why have you never told me?

MR. LONGPAST: Because I didn't want to put ideas into your head, young woman. There are quite enough there already without any encouragement from me. Besides, what was well enough for my generation may not be well at all for yours, as our young friend here has just reminded me.

NELLIE: Well, what were they, anyway?

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MR. LONGPAST: In the middle of the party the host would announce that shadowgraphs were to be performed. A sheet would be suspended at one end of the room, the lights would be put out, except for one brilliant illumination behind the sheet which thus became a lighted screen. Presently figures or, rather, the shadows of figures appeared on the screen. So far as could be surmised, they were unclothed, or clothed at most very scantily. They went through various gestures, wooing, rejecting, withdrawing, consenting, achieving, gestures—how shall I put it—not wholly unconnected with the great passion of love. Then the lights went up and the other guests were asked to guess whose the figures had been. Prizes were offered for correct guesses.

NELLIE: What a delightful idea! I suppose there were always dances and parties in the 'twenties.

MR. LONGPAST: Yes, but you must remember that I was living in Chelsea, and I don't know that the life I enjoyed was in the least typical.

NELLIE: It certainly isn't typical now. [Turning to Logan.] It is true, isn't it, that we don't have anything like so good a time as my uncle's generation?

MR. LONGPAST: True enough, I dare say. The world began to grow solemn in the early 'thirties, and it has remained solemn ever since. [To Logan.] But I wouldn't take my niece too literally, if I were you. Believe me, she has and has had her fill of parties and dances and all that goes with them. I have never seen anybody quite like Nellie at a party for heightened sense of living, for excitement, for sheer, flagrant,

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unabashed enjoyment. She smiles, flushes, minces. Her eyes sparkle and shoot out invitation. Her whole attitude is a challenge, a challenge to our sex. In fact, it's a treat to see her.

NELLIE (archly): Uncle, you shouldn't tell tales out of school.

MR. LONGPAST: All right. Enough about you! Besides, we are interrupting Mr. Logan who was telling us about the interferences and deprivations which brought him to live here and have turned out, if I may say so, so providentially for me this afternoon.

LOGAN: Well, sir, I think your niece has already said most of it. The Government or progress or civilisation or whatever you like to call it, has made London life so dull, so sombre, so dreary and so vulgar that all that is left for those of us who can is to get out of it as expeditiously as possible. And of the two avenues of escape, the Continent and the country, the Government have effectually closed the former by their currency restrictions. Time was when a young man like myself with a small independent income could and did go to France and live cheaply while he was writing; but now the Government has stopped all that. They first turn England into a prison with their regulations and then prevent you from escaping from the prison with their restrictions, so the only other thing was the country—real country, of course, not suburb, and, as you know you have to go a long way to find that. But here, at least, we are free of the State. Nobody ever bothers us here.

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NORAH: But nobody to-day can be free, as you call it, of the State.

LOGAN: I can only answer that *we* are free, James and I. We literally never see an official.

NORAH: But you have to pay your income tax.

LOGAN: Not a penny. Officially I have no income.

NORAH: I thought you said you had a private income.

LOGAN: Did I? Forget it.

NELLIE: Yes, Norah, forget it.

NORAH: Well, but you have to pay rates on your cottage.

LOGAN: Not a rate, I assure you. Nobody ever calls for them. Why should they? No local authority renders us any services; no water—we get ours from the stream—no gas or electricity—we use lamps and candles as you see; no refuse or rubbish collections—we haven't got much rubbish and what we have we bury. Besides it's much too far from the nearest village, let alone town, for the most intrepid collector of rates or rubbish or anything else to find his way out here.

NORAH: What about National Insurance?

LOGAN: Well, what about it?

NORAH: Everybody who employs has to pay a contribution; so does everybody who is employed.

LOGAN: But here we neither employ nor are we employed.

NORAH: Nevertheless, you have to be insured.

JAMES (coming in from the kitchen): Well, we aren't anyway. But I came in to say that supper is ready.

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James was a tall, muscular-looking man with reddish hair and a rather pale, freckled face. He was a good listener who obviously didn't mind playing second fiddle to Logan whom he regarded with a look of dog-like affection.

Supper was served on a deal table at the far end of the long room—apart from a tiny kitchen and scullery this was the only downstairs room in the cottage. Mr. Longpast, who had to be helped up from his chair, limped across to the table leaning on Michael's arm, but apart from the pain in his leg where he thought he had wrenched a muscle he was, he said, feeling in good form. They sat down to a large boiled ham, broad beans and beer, James explaining that they kept a few pigs and had killed one only a few weeks ago. "Do you do your own curing?" Nellie asked. "Certainly we do," said James.

MR. LONGPAST: But this is delicious. Is your recipe for curing secret?

JAMES: Not at all. We cure in old beer; then we wrap the ham in oak sawdust and smoke it.

NORAH: And have you been doing that these last weeks?

JAMES (uncomprehendingly): No.

NORAH: But I thought you said you had killed a pig a week or two ago.

NELLIE (laughing): Not this pig, silly, you don't get ham like this in a week. I expect it has been hanging quite a time, hasn't it?

JAMES: Over a year. As a matter of fact we got this particular one from a farm nearby. If you are interested

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I will show you how we ourselves cure, to-morrow. But the condition of this ham, you know, isn't just a matter of curing and smoking. There is a good deal in the feeding.

MR. LONGPAST: That's another advantage of living well away from the modern city. I, too, have a farm but as it isn't more than fifty miles from London it is well in the State's eye, and the State makes all sorts of rules about what I may do and what I mayn't—two pigs a year, for example, is the most that I can kill for my own eating—and then harasses me with the constant visits of its inspectors to see that I don't break its silly rules. I suppose that nobody ever inspects *your* pigs?

LOGAN: No sir. I doubt very much whether anybody knows we've got 'em.

NORAH: Where is the nearest food office?

JAMES: Well, the nearest house is a good mile and a half down the valley and the nearest food office will be four or five miles beyond that.

NELLIE: I bet Norah wants to go and give information. She's a State-employed official you know, a probation officer or almoner or something, so it's in her blood.

NORAH: Nellie, don't be horrid.

MR. LONGPAST: Now then, young ones, none of that. [To Logan.] My leg is throbbing and if you will excuse me, I would like to go to bed.

LOGAN: Certainly, I will lead the way, if you will follow me.

Long after Mr. Longpast had gone to bed Nellie,

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Logan, James, Norah and Michael sat up over the fire. Logan was obviously attracted by Nellie's good looks and quick mind. With seemingly perfect comprehension and womanly sympathy she subscribed to his views, especially as touching the need for withdrawal from the solicitous interferences of the Welfare State. With an almost uncanny precision she shared and even anticipated his tastes about books and music, art and nature even before he had time to unfold them. Withal he was so neat and trim in her figure, her bosom was so tight and plump, the curves of her behind so roundly convex that, accustomed as he had been to living with James for so many months, he was moved by desires whose distinctive quality he had almost forgotten.

It was on this evening, too, that Michael felt for the first time the power of Norah's personality. Michael was one of those many Englishmen who grow up late. He had been more than usually dependent first on his nurse and then on his mother, and was already looking round half unconsciously for a woman to succeed in these capacities. His primary need was to be guided through life, to be cared for and looked after, and Norah, so knowledgeable, so coolly efficient, was already being recognised and hailed, albeit unconsciously, as a potential carer-for and looker-after. She would fill up all the forms, cut out all the coupons, interview all the inspectors, apply for all the licences at the right times, and in general fulfil the innumerable duties and demands of the modern State to everybody's complete satisfaction. Mistress to his youth, companion to his middle age, nurse to his old, she would be his perfect

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mate through all the stages of his life. But while he already felt so strong a need of her, his natural diffidence set him wondering what she could ever see in him. For the present he sat very close to her and thrilled with pride when she let him hold her hand. James busied himself with household chores, getting in a fresh supply of logs and laying the table for breakfast in the morning.

VI

Our "Culture"

The next morning turned out fine and sunny with great clouds sailing like ships across the sky. Mr. Longpast was clearly unable to walk and as he was loth to trespass upon his friends' hospitality longer than was necessary, he was insistent that somebody should go over to Buttermere and collect the car. Logan volunteered to lead the party, and after a display of competing self-sacrifices, it was decided that Nellie, Norah and Michael should accompany him and that James should stay behind with Mr. Longpast.

When they started, the tops of the hills were shrouded in mist, but this gradually lifted and from the top of the Pillar-Steeple ridge a wonderful view was obtained, as the shifting shadows of the clouds chased one another over the green floor of the Liza valley and the surrounding hillsides. Arthur, as Nellie had now begun to call Logan, proposed to vary their route by first going down into Ennerdale and then over the hills again by way of Scale Force down to Crummock and Buttermere. This route was a little farther and involved two climbs instead of one, though the second was not more than a thousand feet, but all declared

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themselves fit and well and ready for anything. In the event, a most delightful walk was enjoyed. They descended into Ennerdale from Grike, skirted the lower end of the Lake, paused for a drink at the Anglers and then went up again, to descend by the waters of the magnificently picturesque Scale Force which runs into the Buttermere valley between Buttermere Lake and Crummock. They picked up the car and a long drive of some fifty miles which took them down to the coast, brought them back to the cottage in Highdale about six.

Mr. Longpast, who had no love for his own company, feeling (rightly) afraid whenever he looked within, and finding people useful for keeping his gaze fixed unremittingly outward, was delighted to see them back. He had found James's company a little mild but he was much intrigued by Arthur, sensing in him an attitude that was new to Mr. Longpast's generation. "This," he said to himself, "is what sensitive young men are beginning to feel about the society we are building in Britain. I must look into it further." Accordingly, when supper, consisting mainly of a large dish of bacon and eggs and a Wensleydale cheese—"Yes," said James in answer to Mr. Longpast's query, "we can still get them up here"—had been cleared, he took up the theme of the previous night's conversation.

"I would like," he said, "to hear some more about these deprivations that you say have turned you against the social life of London and sent you to exile yourselves up here, as far away from the amenities of the modern State as you can possibly get."

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ARTHUR: I'll try to explain myself, though it isn't easy. You must think of me as a young man, or as a would-be young man of letters. I wanted to write, to talk about literature and books and to live in the atmosphere of cultivated people—Dr. Johnson and his circle, the pre-Raphaelites, the Chesterton-Belloc group, the Bloomsbury of the 'twenties, that sort of thing—and I didn't mind how poor I was or how obscure, provided that I could live in this sort of environment. Well, the first discovery I made was that nothing of the kind any longer existed in London, that authors, in so far as authorship was still a profession, had scattered themselves all over the countryside of the Home Counties. There were no longer any literary circles.

MR. LONGPAST: What on earth do you mean by literary circles? Not, I hope, the Book League or the Society of Authors or anything of that kind?

ARTHUR: I agree it is a vague phrase. Let me give you an example. I have met lots of established authors who had told me of the literary dinners and lunches, specially lunches, they were invited to when they first came to London and in the hope of making their names. Wells, for example, used to give them and so did Bennett. At Wells's there would generally be two or three attractive smartish women, generally writing themselves——

MR. LONGPAST: I bet there were.

ARTHUR: Who chattered very agreeably and seemed to regard Wells with a sort of amused veneration. You would also be apt to meet a literary lion or two, Somerset Maugham, say, or Galsworthy or, a bit later

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D. H. Lawrence or Aldous Huxley. The point was that you really were in a literary atmosphere. Everybody knew about books, everybody discussed them, nearly everybody was trying to write them. Above all you met people who might be useful to you as a writer; you learned how reputations were made, lost and fluctuated, and picked up valuable wrinkles about publishers and how to deal with them. Now, in the London to which I came there was absolutely nothing in the least like this. I doubt if there was an equivalent literary society at all. If there was, there was nobody with enough money to bring it together and entertain it. Consequently you never met the great men in your world, the established practitioners of your craft.

MR. LONGPAST: In my time—how well I remember them—there were the publishers' parties.

ARTHUR: I have never been to one. Not well known enough, I suppose.

MR. LONGPAST: Oh, you didn't have to be well known. The publisher would seize upon the occasion provided by the publication of a new book by a "promising" author to throw a cocktail party. There were the staff of the publishing house and its authors, all the critics that had ever been heard of, writers who had "made good" or other "promising" young authors upon whom the publisher had his eye as possible "catches". Hundreds of people would be crowded together all talking excitedly at the tops of their voices and, of course, everywhere there were the women—mothers, wives, sweethearts, sisters, clerks, typists, mistresses, Lesbians and, above all, women authors

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uh, Mr. Logan, if there is one thing that exceeds the vanity of a male author it is that of a female author.

What a din we used to make! Even if conversation hadn't been made impossible by the row, there was no attempt at continuity of talk between persons. You could see the eye of your conversational partner constantly on the watch or, rather, you could see the tail-end of it on the watch as it roved the room for somebody of greater interest and importance than yourself to swim into its area of vision; you could see the light of interest fade visibly out of it as the more desirable conversationalist presently appeared, and you would brace yourself against the abrupt departure, possibly in mid-sentence, of your interlocutor as he made off after the desired contact. As I remember these occasions, they were pretty ruthless, but they *were* a get-together of literary people. People did meet one another and get the feeling of belonging to a single world. And now you tell me these affairs are no more.

ARTHUR: I can only say that they have never come my way.

MR. LONGPAST: I can well believe it. In the heyday of the publisher's party there was always a certain amount of room to move about, meet people and talk; later, as they got fewer and fewer, they were thronged to the point of solidity by people who would go anywhere for a drink. I imagine that in the end they were killed by the hordes of drink-seeking gate-crashers. But are there no literary week-ends?

ARTHUR: Again, I can only say that they haven't come my way.

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MR. LONGPAST: Well, they were common enough up to the late 'thirties. There was the arrival at the inevitable week-end cottage on the Saturday afternoon in time for tea; the meeting with the two or three other guests, all of them either directly or indirectly literary—they would be a writer or two, perhaps a publisher perhaps a B.B.C. man—and between tea and dinner there would be continuous literary gossip. On Sunday morning the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times* were carefully scanned and discussed, more particularly the reviews and publishers' adverts. In the afternoon there would be a walk, with everybody talking all the time and in the evening discussion about trains back to London. Some might go on the Sunday evening in preference to the rigours of early Monday morning rising. It doesn't sound much—it wasn't much; sometimes, indeed, it was desperately boring—but you *did* meet literary people; you *did* talk the shop of your trade; you were given for a moment the sense that you weren't just an isolated individual pursuing some lunatic operation with a pen in a society of labourers, technicians, officials and business men who despised you and were right to, but a practitioner of a recognised ancient and honourable profession. Now, I suppose literary people are too poor to invite their kind to stay with them at week-ends; can't feed them for one thing.

ARTHUR: It's rather that literary people, even the best known ones, are much too poor to have houses large enough to put people up in. Take as long-established and well-known a writer as Compton Mackenzie

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recently knighted for his services to literature. He sells the copyright of some books to the United States for £10,000, buys and does up a lovely old house in Berkshire on the proceeds, establishes a vast library there, only to be subjected, years later, to a visitation of income tax men who demand the £10,000 or most of it, with the result that he has to sell his house to pay them off. There's another well-established writer I know, H. E. Bates. He recently said in public that he has to pay so much in income tax that in order to live at all he has to peg away writing book after book. No resting on his oars; no enjoyment of hard-won leisure for him.

MR. LONGPAST: What is more to the point, no time to moon about the world in quest of the experiences which are, after all, the raw material of any novelist's art.

NORAH: I wouldn't mind betting that for all that there are lots of people who would jump at the chance of changing places with Sir Compton and Mr. Bates. After all, to have £10,000 for tax to be levied on is hopelessly beyond the reach of most of us.

ARTHUR: But don't you see, the thing isn't a tax at all but a fine? An author struggles for years in obscurity and very likely poverty trying to make both ends meet with the aid of an occasional bit of free-lance journalism, though, by the way, even this is now denied him owing to the shortage of newsprint. At last he writes a book which sells, with the result that in a particular year he nets a substantial sum in royalties. Instead of spreading this over the lean years when the

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chap was earning little or nothing, the years, perhaps, when he was experimenting and gaining the experience which in the end enabled him to turn out his success, the beastly income tax people charge up everything against the one year in which the money was actually received, charging, therefore, a swinging surtax on top of the income tax.

NELLIE: My friend Freda Jakes was awarded one of the rich American prizes for one of her novels, £25,000 it came to—and a shocking novel, too. I'm blessed if the income tax people didn't collect £21,000, leaving her with a bare £4,000.

ARTHUR: You see how it is; writers have to go on writing when they have nothing to say, writing until they drop in order to preserve themselves at all against the depredations of the income tax people—which, of course, is one of the many reasons why so many bad and so few good works are now produced.

MR. LONGPAST: My dear chap, when you have lived in a thoroughly Philistine country as long as I have, you will get used to that sort of thing. I have never known a Government and I have never known a Chancellor of the Exchequer who had the slightest sympathy with art or literature or music, or the least understanding of the needs of those who make these things their profession. Consequently, when the pinch comes, as it has come now, the life of the artist, the writer, the composer, is the first to be nipped. These things the English feel instinctively, are the mere trimmings of society, and when society gets into trouble they are the first to be sacrificed. So, my dear chap, don't be under any

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Illusion. It isn't that the State is *deliberately* making your position impossible; being what it is, an English State, it can't, from its very nature, do other than it does.

MICHAEL: Which, I suppose, is also why municipal orchestras are being closed down all over the place.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, that's not exactly the State. That's the local authority, Bournemouth and Birmingham and the rest of them, of whose tastes and values no doubt the State is a slightly less inglorious reflection, just as the authorities themselves are slightly less inglorious reflections of the taste of the British public whom they represent.

NORAH: But London is full of good music. Just think of the number of good concerts there are to go to.

MR. LONGPAST: Full of music, certainly, though the quality of the concerts sometimes seems to vary in inverse proportion to their number. But London is also full of Jews and German refugees. It also contains among its eight millions at least nine-tenths of those among the English whose taste is cultivated. Outside London you won't find one in a hundred, nay, one in five hundred, whose soul rises above light music canned from America. As a matter of fact, we have a fair measure of the proportions of the two sections of the population in the figures of those who listen respectively to the Third and the Light programmes, which, I am told, are as one is to fifty. Outside London, Oxford and Cambridge you may broadly say that there is no independent musical culture in this country.

ARTHUR: It seems to me, sir, that judged by the standard of the past, whatever there *is* in the way of

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culture, and by that I mean whatever in the way of human activity can't be regulated, produced to order or economically justified, and which makes no money for the State or anybody else, is rapidly disappearing. Museums and galleries are being shut, orchestras quietly closed down, writers go off to the United States or just fade out—what a lot of writers there are, by the way, who write one or two good books and then stop—the theatre in the provinces after a brief blooming during and just after the war resorts to cinema, artists are increasingly unable to make a living. Compared with our own time, even the nineteenth century seems a halcyon age of culture. The Victorians set up the museums and the galleries that we are closing, and though their paintings may have been appalling, painters at least made a living. But the Welfare State, which is supposed to look after all its citizens, has no place in it for the artist.

MR. LONGPAST: May I remind you of the pregnant observation of Thucydides, "war destroys the margin of civilisation". All the things that concern you are on the margin. Hence, not only do we not add anything ourselves to our cultural heritage—look at our terrible spreading suburbs; who in the future, if there is a future, will, I wonder, pay a visit of pious inspection to admire the shops and houses on the North Circular Road, the characteristic emanations of our time; listen to our music, Britten and all; think of our war memorials—but we can't even preserve what previous ages have laid down. Our orchestras, as you observe, are disbanded, our museums and picture galleries closed, our pictures and furniture sold to the United States, our

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lovely country houses, the most glorious emanations of the British genius, fall to pieces or become the prey of girls' schools or "looney bins".

NORAH: But most of this is inevitable, being due to economic circumstances which have destroyed the old leisured class which had the time to cultivate the arts and the money to patronise them. Now that the patron has disappeared, of course the State, the local authority, and such semi-State organisations as the British Council and the Arts Council, must step in to take their place, and this precisely is what they do do, especially since the coming of the Labour Government.

ARTHUR: But, my dear girl, that is precisely what they don't do. I was brought up a Socialist and I believed that Socialism was not just an economic creed which would spread the materialist values of nineteenth-century Capitalism through every class of the community. I believed that Socialism meant the opening of the minds and the enriching of the souls of men and women everywhere, believed, in fact, in my innocence, in the Merrie England of art and song, of Robert Blatchford and William Morris. But how remote is this from the cinemas and dance halls, the dog racing and the dirt-track racing, and the omniprevalent football pools of the Welfare State. Culture is an affair of individuals. It can't be turned on like a tap, either by a Socialist State or by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. What can be centrally provided and distributed is not culture but mass entertainment.

MR. LONGPAST: I agree with you. And there is something else which you haven't mentioned yet.

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ARTHUR: What's that?

MR. LONGPAST: A common background of contemporary reading. If you will forgive me for again referring to my own youth, when I was growing up there were half a dozen or more writers whom everybody one knew had read. On the horizon, just setting or about to set, were the suns of Meredith, Hardy and Henry James; shining in mid-day brightness were Shaw, Chesterton, Belloc, Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett, not to speak of a host of subsidiary lights like Jerome K. Jerome, James Barrie, W. W. Jacobs and Arthur Conan Doyle. All these were established authors, and so far as the first lot, at any rate, were concerned, whenever a book by any one of them came out, everybody pounced on it and read it; or if they hadn't read it, they thought it worth while to make a pretence of having done so, to the extent at least of knowing what it was about, if they were to pass muster in the society of educated persons. All this made for the establishment of a common background of literary culture, in that we all had a common fund of contemporary reading to draw upon for talk and criticism. In the 'twenties again there was a group, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster—though most of his work had been done by 1914—Virginia Woolf, and a little later T. S. Eliot—not that I have ever been able to read him myself—whom everybody was supposed to have read and most of us did in fact read. Again, then, a common background for the interchange of comment and criticism. But now, as far as I can see, with the exception of Hemingway and Somerset

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Maugham, who belongs to a different age, there are no *standard* authors, which means that none of us have read the same books.

NORAH: But surely that can't be true. It seems to me that there have never been so many good writers. Read the advertisements in the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times* and see what the critics say about the novels they review—why, there seem to be no end to the masterpieces that are being produced. Indeed, a person like myself who has to earn her own living finds it very hard to keep up with them all.

A general laugh greeted this piece of innocence. "Dear Norah," said Nellie, "she is indeed a very serious girl."

MICHAEL (coming to her assistance): Well, but the publishers' advertisements do say just these things and they are only quoting the comments which the critics, not the publishers, have already made. What Norah says is quite true. Every week *does* bring out its crop of masterpieces.

MR. LONGPAST (ignoring this, to Arthur): Tell me, Arthur, you who are a literary man. . . .

ARTHUR: Sorry, only a would-be literary man, sir.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, anyway, you know what is going on in your generation and keep up with it—tell me who are the outstanding writers to-day. Who are the people whom your generation simply *has* to read?

ARTHUR (after a long pause): Well, there are the Greens. [Mr. Longpast made a face and emitted a rude noise.]

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ARTHUR: Haven't you read them, sir? I assure you they are very highly thought of.

MR. LONGPAST: No doubt, and they are, are they not, the names that are inevitably mentioned when this sort of question is asked? So, wishing to keep myself up to date, I have indeed read them, or at least read *some* books by them.

ARTHUR: Well, what do you think of them?

MR. LONGPAST: Of which? They *are* rather different, aren't they? Take the Green whose Christian name I forget who writes books with titles like *Doting*, *Loving*, *Hating*. On the pegs of these absurd titles he hangs novels which don't seem to me to be about anything at all. A servant girl finds her mistress in bed with a lover and gossips about it with the butler, and then there is a lot about pigeons—symbolic pigeons, or aren't they, perhaps, symbolic at all? Really, I don't know. What beats me is how, with all the canvas of contemporary life to paint on, with dynasties falling, wars raging, revolutions threatening and mankind solemnly preparing the means of its own destruction, a novelist can concern himself with such trifling, and lay claim to be taken seriously.

ARTHUR: But he is thought to be very sensitive, sir, I assure you. Very subtle insight into character and all that!

MR. LONGPAST: But what characters! And into what is this penetrating insight directed? Into what an uneducated girl may or may not have noted in an emotional situation. Who cares? Yet this is one of our contemporary, outstanding writers whom we are

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supposedly to set beside the Dickenses and Thackerays and Trollopes and George Eliots of the past.

But I am forgetting. There is the greater Greene, Graham, the writer of Catholic thrillers, the Greene with the jerky, staccato style; Greene, the novelist of guilt and remorse—our little Mauriac.

ARTHUR: Well, sir, don't you agree that he is a great writer? What about *The Power and the Glory*?

MR. LONGPAST: Since he gave up writing thrillers proper, which, I agree, did convey something of the excitement of the chase, I personally find him a shocking bore—and a lowering, dispiriting bore to boot. No humour, no high spirits, no zest or gusto.

ARTHUR: Really, sir, I find that a bit sweeping. After all, leaving out Somerset Maugham, he *is* our leading novelist.

MR. LONGPAST: Oh, you do, do you? Let me try and substantiate my sweeping assertions, which I am fortunate in the happy position of being able to do, because I have just been reading a Greene novel. Indeed, I carried it in my rucksack over the mountains—enough of itself to make you warm to any book, and there it lies on the table beside me. It is called *The End of the Fair*, and it has been highly praised. Indeed, many critics describe it as being his best work, which is why I read it. Have you read it, by the way?

ARTHUR: Not yet, sir.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, don't. It's utterly dreary and unconvincing. It's about an old love affair, not, of course, told straightforwardly but in bits and pieces in the usual lique Greene method—he can't, it seems, tell a

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straight story—as the narrator remembers first this and then that. As the memories are just put down in the order in which they apparently occur to him, you are never quite sure in what order the events took place. Chronology, by the way, was never Greene's strong point. Why can't he just begin at the beginning with "Once upon a time . . ." like anybody else and then go on to the end? Too obvious, I suppose. Yet pretty well all the world's great novelists, in fact, among other things, tell a story, which begins at the beginning and goes on to the end. Think of Hardy, Tolstoy, Chaucer, Maupassant, all of them writing books which in their different ways are variations upon the theme which begins with "once upon a time . . ." and ends with "lived happily ever after" or "miserably ever after" or "didn't live at all", because the novelist has killed them off. It seems to me that there is nobody writing now who can tell, or at any rate is content to tell, a straightforward story—straightforward in the sense of not being a series of flashbacks, or of memories jotted down as they occur—a story which you read on from page to page simply because you want to know what is going to happen. This inability to tell a story is all of a piece with the comparable inability of our composers to write a tune with a good, long melodic line, something that you can remember, as Schubert did, or Mozart.

NELLIE: For goodness' sake, Uncle, don't get on to all your hobby-horses at once. We all know about people not being able to write stories and tunes, because we have heard about it from you ever since we can remember. With your digressions and digressions

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from digressions, you are just like the writers and composers you complain of. What about getting on with Graham Greene?

MR. LONGPAST: Sorry, sorry! Well, where was I?

NELLIE: Nowhere at all. You hadn't even begun.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, the book's about a love affair between the narrator and a married woman, and in the middle of it she leaves him.

NELLIE: Why?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, she doesn't really know, so you can't expect me to tell you. As she so laboriously explains, the reasons were incomprehensible to her at the time—and I would just like to rub in the fact that they remain incomprehensible to the reader at all times—but as it subsequently turns out, she has found God and has made a vow to God.

ARTHUR: Sounds odd to me.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, it *is* odd. You see the pair of them are making love and then the house is bombed. She finds him lying under a door and thinks at first that he is dead, whereupon she feels constrained to make a vow: "Let him be alive," she prays, "and I will believe." Not only so, but "I will give him up for ever." And then, rightly appalled by the promise she has made, she proceeds to comfort herself by reflecting that "People can love without seeing each other, can't they? They love you all their lives without seeing you." Well, he recovers and she *does* give him up, and presently she dies. And that's that.

ARTHUR: But has there been any previous mention of religion in the book; has she, for example, been

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represented as believing in or even wondering about God before this?

MR. LONGPAST: None whatever, which only increases one's surprise at the arbitrariness of the whole thing. Talk about action springing naturally from the natures of the actors, of people, in other words, behaving in character! In Greene's world anybody seems quite capable at any moment of performing any action. And did you ever hear of anything so damned silly as that stuff about people loving one another who never meet? What's the good of his loving her if she never sees him, or of her loving him if he never sees her? So pointless! And why wasn't the poor chap consulted anyway? You see, she acts entirely off her own bat, the result being that everything turns out for the worst. She dies of pneumonia and a broken heart; he finds that he can't love anybody else and is utterly wretched. Maximum misery for everybody all round!

NORAH: But it must have a moral in it somewhere.

MR. LONGPAST: Very likely, but what is it?

NORAH: That if people love illicitly, God will punish them out sooner or later for what they have done.

MR. LONGPAST: But that is so manifestly not true at any rate of their fortune in this world.

NORAH: Well, then, leaving God out of it, that people love illicitly, everybody concerned will ultimately be made miserable.

MR. LONGPAST: I deny it. That again is flagrantly untrue. Just think of the people in history and literature, just think of the people one knows who have loved one another without being married and had the

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Well of a good time. I can count them by the dozen. Why, I myself. . . . Well, we won't go into my affairs, but I can assure you that, having loved the women I ought not to have loved and left unloved the women I ought to have loved, I am very well, thank you.

NORAH: So far, perhaps you are, but you aren't finished yet. Who, I should like to know, is going to look after you when you are old and ill and beyond loving and being loved?

NELLIE: Shut up, Norah; don't be such a ghoul. But Uncle, what else about the Greene book?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, I've told you the dim little story with its silly moral, if that *is* its moral. As to character drawing, I assure you, you carry away no picture of the people at all. Sarah, the woman, is the centre of the book, but she remains shadowy and faceless. You hear about the way she makes love, how "she arched her back in the moment of love" and so on, but for the rest, there is no character with an outline sufficiently firm for you to grasp and fix in the memory—merely a sequence of conflicting and often contradictory appearances—all of which makes the narrator's reactions to Sarah rather less surprising than they might otherwise be. "I hate her," he says, and then "I love her." "She was a good woman" he assures himself, "no, she was a whore . . ." and so on. Compare her with, say, Anna Karenina and you realise the extent to which she simply doesn't live.

Then there is Henry, the husband, a decent civil servant, utterly non-entitled—another character

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without a face or, indeed, without a body of any kind.

There is no attempt to individualise these dim personages by their mode of talking. They all talk alike and their dim drip of conversation about past loves is the substance of the novel. There's nothing else—no humour, no jollity, no gusto, no zest—above all, no outstanding or memorable theme. But it's the general dreariness of the book that I think I chiefly object to. What, one wonders, was the book written for at all, if it wasn't to lower and depress the reader? And what a fuss to make about love! Why, the thing might have been written by a woman, for it is women who attribute this importance to loving and being loved, because it is the only thing they can do.

Oh, and there's one other thing. I'm blessed if Greene doesn't go and put himself into the novel. "Patronisingly in the end," he writes "he" (a young critic) "would place me"—"me" being Graham Greene—"probably a little above Maugham because Maugham is popular and I have not yet committed that crime"; and a little later the young critic is made to refer to Greene as "a skilled craftsman whose work has greater sympathy, perhaps, than Mr. Maugham's". What infernal cheek! Why, Greene can't hold a candle to Maugham who for general vitality, ability as a storyteller and fertility of invention, the construction of incidents is so incomparably superior to Greene that the comparison between them is nothing short of an impertinence—let alone the facts that Maugham is one of the greatest stylists now writing English—that he

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can create real, recognisable people—Rosie for instance in *Cakes and Ale*—and knows more about the human heart than Greene will ever do, even if he were to live until Doomsday. Really, I never heard such cheek.

Mr. Longpast was so indignant that, forgetting his injured foot, he rose from his chair with a view to a declamatory stamping about the room, but his foot refusing to take the sudden weight, he fell back with a groan of surprised anguish into his chair. The incident didn't improve the temper with which he greeted Norah's mild remonstrance that, if he didn't hold with Graham Greene, there was always Christopher Fry.

At the mention of this name, Mr. Longpast literally howled with distaste. Norah was outraged. "You can't," she said, "dismiss our leading dramatist by making rude noises."

MR. LONGPAST: This is too much. Who says he is our leading dramatist?

NORAH: Well, nobody, perhaps, in so many words but it is a generally understood thing, and what's more, he is advancing and developing all the time. But, I wouldn't take it upon myself to say such a thing, if the best critics and judges weren't themselves in agreement. Why, only last Sunday I read in the *Observer* in a survey of the literary events of 1951, a remark by Stephen Spender which said just this. [Norah dived into the handbag which she had carried with her over the mountains and produced the previous Sunday's *Observer*.] Yes, here it is. [She read.] "The dramatist

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who really seemed to have taken a step forward this year was Christopher Fry with *A Sleep of Prisoners*, which seems to me to be his best work." So you see, you can't just dismiss Fry like that.

MR. LONGPAST: It may surprise you to learn that I have seen *A Sleep of Prisoners* or, rather, I have seen as much of it as I could stand; and a most distressing experience it was which I shan't easily forget. The play, if I remember, consisted of four men having nightmares in a church. For the most part, they talked or chanted in a kind of sing-song about their war experiences, but every now and then they burst without warning into loud and horrid cries, and the devil of it was they wouldn't keep still. Instead of stopping in the choir where they originally appeared, they began to dart about all over the church, turning up in the pulpit, at the altar, at the lectern, in the nave. Just when the intolerable dreariness of their monotone was sending you quietly off to sleep, one of them would appear in the pew behind you with a green light shining on his face and with a sharp yelp wake you up again. Well, here are these chaps, groaning, shouting and screeching about all over the church—I never heard such a din in my life—but what it was all about I have very little idea. As far as I could understand, the "prisoners" were expressing the elements of their unconscious selves which, according to some psycho-analytic theory or other, are supposed to upsurge into consciousness in dreams and nightmares. Hence, presumably, the horrid groans, the yelps of fear and dismay, the atavistic hatreds and lusts pouring

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themselves out in these distressing gobbets of truncated sound as if the characters were being psychologically and very audibly sick. Is that what the contemporary serious drama has come to? For contents the dregs of the unconscious expressed in yelps and groans instead of the workings of a civilised consciousness expressed in epigram and wit; for dialogue, the monosyllabic banalities of Army slang, instead of the reasonable intercommunications of adult minds; and for action, distraught men rushing idiotically about a church and suddenly turning up in pews and aisles. Shades of Shaw and Sheridan, not to mention Shakespeare who was, I'm afraid, on occasion a little given to that sort of thing himself.

ARTHUR: You put it strongly, sir, not but what I would have agreed with you that Fry is overrated. He is overrated because it was such a change for us to hear people on the stage using words of more than one syllable, put together in sentences of more than half a dozen words, sometimes even in musical verse, that we thought that some kind of intellectual content was being conveyed; that Fry, in other words, had something to say.

MR. LONGPAST: Surely it's pretty clear by now that he hasn't. I will grant you that he starts off every now and then with an idea or two—that's not such a bad idea at the beginning of *Venus Observed* when the chap suggests that his son shall choose a mother from a gathering of his own discarded mistresses especially summoned for the occasion—but he hasn't the intellectual power to work the thing out. There is neither

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moral nor message and the subject peters out into a bog of words. If I'm wrong, if he *has* something to say, what is it?

Arthur had to confess that he didn't know, nor was he much more successful when Mr. Longpast pressed him about the plays of T. S. Eliot, about *The Cocktail Party* and *The Family Reunion*. What, after all, were *they* after? Mr. Longpast then passed contemporary poetry in rapid review. Could anybody, he asked, understand it? Norah thought that she often did, and Arthur was sure that he did. "But really understand?" asked Mr. Longpast, "in the sense that you can understand 'My luvie is like a red, red rose' or 'Come away, come away Death' or any of the really lovely poems in the language, or good second-rate stuff like *Enoch Arden* or *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* or a *Border Ballad* or even the *Bab Ballads*?"

Norah observed that of course modern poetry is more complicated than poetry used to be, that it wasn't, for example, content just to tell a story like a ballad or an epic, but that it probed deep into the nature of things while its elusiveness enabled it to express fine nuances of meaning, subtle shades of emotion, which hadn't hitherto fallen within the compass of poetry.

MR. LONGPAST: But in order that it may produce these effects, I think you would agree that you must first understand it.

NORAH: In a sense, I suppose, yes.

MR. LONGPAST: Well, let's turn to the current *New Statesman* that I see Arthur so providentially takes in. In this journal are printed week by week poems which

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presumably represent the best or at any rate the most typical of contemporary work. [Reaching for the *New Statesman*, Mr. Longpast began to read.*]

THE TOWER

*Pile upon pile of thought he drove
Into the sobbing bog below,
While others on the shaking raft
Of laughter travelled to and fro;
Light after light of love sailed by
His single and unseeing eye.*

*Coldly he willed and slowly strove
To build the lean and winding stair,
While, wide and high, the idle drove
Swung on hyperboles of air;
In hoops of happiness they curled
Bat-like about his darkening world.*

*Whose was the hand that laid the pyre?
What was the foot that fled the stair?
Look how the jarring tongues of fire
Roll out and glory-hole the air:
From the charred arches of his brain
The golden girders fall like rain
Upon the unforgiving plain.*

* *Publishers' Note.* It has seemed best to leave the characteristic passage on the next page as Dr. Joad wrote it, perverse as Mr. Longpast's strictures obviously are. The poem is by Mr. W. R. Rodgers, and appeared in the *New Statesman* of September 22nd, 1951. Mr. Longpast quoted only the second and third stanzas. Mr. Rodgers and his publishers, Messrs. Secker and Warburg Ltd., have very kindly allowed us to reproduce the poem in full.

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MR. LONGPAST (continuing): Now have you [looking at Norah] the faintest idea what that's about? What is the "lean and winding stair"? Who are "the idle drove"? What are "the charred arches" and "golden girders of his brain"? What in the name of goodness is it all about?

Gathering round this curiosity they subjected it to a minute investigation, but after considerable study issuing in many conjectures and some ribaldry, they were compelled to admit that they really didn't know.

"But if not meaningful," asked Mr. Longpast, "is it perhaps beautiful, beautiful because of its wording and imagery, or memorable because of its lilt and rhythm, in the sense in which some of Shakespeare's songs are beautiful and memorable, although they amount to little or nothing from the point of view of meaning? Can you, for example, imagine yourself memorising the thing and humming it to yourself as you walk on the fells?"

The notion of anybody remembering or humming such stuff was so absurd that Norah and Michael took refuge in alleging the poem's unrepresentativeness. It was, they averred, a particularly unfortunate example of the modern school. But asking for a file of old numbers of the *New Statesman*, most of which contained poems, Mr. Longpast, by reading a number of poems taken at random, quickly disabused them of this notion, for all were almost equally unintelligible.

Mr. Longpast then turned to music, and maintained that we were so anxious to have a great English composer that we insisted on turning our geese into swans,

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and elevated Britten who was no more than a very local goose into the higher flights of musical genius. Now the essence of music was memorable melody, just as the essence of literature was story. And what memorable melodies, pray, had Britten written, or Bliss or Bax or Bloch or Berkeley or Bartok? If there were any such, he challenged them to remember and to hum them. Their joint efforts at memory produced one and one only, the melody of Britten's "Song of the Birds" in *Let's Make an Opera*.

"Lovely," said Mr. Longpast, "but one or two herons, owls and chaffinches don't make a composer. People," he went on, "like Norah, impressed by the number of contemporary composers and of concerts of contemporary music, deduce that England is no longer 'the land without music'. You might just as well say that America is a land of athletes because Americans won most of the gold medals at the Olympic Games, whereas *we* know that most Americans have pretty well lost the use of their legs owing to their excessive addiction to cars. For where," he went on, "is there to-day any native melody in England? Even the art of the Victorian ballad, even the vulgar lilt of the music-hall song or the Sankey and Moody hymn book have died away."

NELLIE: Uncle, you are quoting Miss Flightly's grandmother—you remember, the perforated stamps and all that?

MR. LONGPAST: Well, what if I am? She was quite right. Ours is an age which will be remembered, in so far as it is remembered at all, for its total lack of

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song, an age in which people have ceased utterly to produce or to render music for themselves; an age in which errand boys no longer whistle. "Listen," he said, "to the next batch of soldiers you meet in the train, producing in their embarrassment those dreary sounds that they call whistling—they all do it, God knows why. Never by the remotest chance do these sounds convey the slightest suggestion of a tune. The truth is that the poor brutes don't know any tunes and consequently they can neither sing nor whistle.

"As with literature, as with drama, as with poetry, as with music, so also with painting—who on earth," Mr. Longpast wanted to know, "is going to purchase or does purchase the wretched non-representative daubs that are exhibited in parks and on the Embankment? Who, for that matter, is going to saddle himself with the pictures of the 'one-man shows' that look out upon the fashionable crowds from the walls of the smart galleries?—and so also with philosophy, whose manner becomes increasingly unintelligible as its matter becomes increasingly trifling. But I won't," Mr. Longpast magnanimously concluded, "regale you with a disquisition on contemporary philosophy. I know too much about it."

A murmur of pleased assent greeted this announcement, and as Mr. Longpast had now been talking for some considerable time, it was felt on all hands that he should be spared the labours of further exposition. "There is just one question I would like to put to you," said Arthur, "before we stop. What is the purpose of this comprehensive diatribe?"

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MR. LONGPAST: To exhibit our age as utterly uncreative. It is an age without art, without beauty and without genius. Now that Shaw's dead I suppose that Tommy Beecham is the only man of genius in the country, and he's in his seventies. What is more, it is exceedingly unlikely that, short of a major catastrophe ushering in a new Dark Age, creativity will return to the arts. Hence, there is good reason for thinking that the arts will remain second-rate, until in the end they are reduced, as they are already reduced in Russia, to a glorification of the State by artists drawing State salaries. Shall I explain further?

To this question there was a great cry of "No!" It was getting late and the car being now restored, it had been decided to make an early start in the morning. Before they went to bed a hearty invitation was extended to Arthur and James to visit Folly Farm to which Mr. Longpast was returning on the morrow. Nellie was particularly pressing in her seconding of Mr. Longpast's invitation and before they left it had been decided that Arthur at least should travel southwards in a week's time. James, manifestly a little hurt by Arthur's obvious interest in Nellie, was politely not sure whether after all he would be able to come.

Postscript

I have been undecided for some weeks what I should do with these my poor characters. Having created them in what I am pleased to believe is the Peacock manner, and having used them as mouthpieces for sentiments I wished to express or ridicule, I find it difficult to return them to the puppet-cupboard with the unconcern Peacock would have shown. I have had—which Peacock had not—to withstand the influence of the cinema, whose characters are so unreal that we do not mind them being paired off in their little modern “semis” to contemplate an eternity of treacly happy-ever-afterness. Whatever the reason, I feel—or felt, for I have subdued the feeling—an obligation towards my characters. I even felt I must create some action for them—if only to prove to myself that I could make them act as well as talk. Indeed, I went so far as to write a final chapter in which Poynter fought almost to the death with Arthur Logan for the privilege of cuckolding Christopher. I wrote it and I read it. I even enjoyed it. But I tore it up. I am certain, on reflection, that those readers who are sufficiently interested in Poynter and Nellie and in Michael and Norah will be able to imagine for themselves an ending more exactly to their taste than I could have written. For my part I have done with them.

